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19 DEC 2006

12.12.06

Local Government Boundary Commission

Dear sirs,

1. I am responding to the request for comments on the proposed boundary changes even though I know that I am totally wasting my time as the government never embarks on such consultation until after all of the decisions have been taken. The obvious recent examples are those of rates and of water-rates, systems being driven through for reasons of new-labour ideology and in the face of fierce opposition from all sides. No doubt new-labour has every intention of driving through the changes to councils in the same way regardless of need, benefits, problems of, or effects on the ratepayers involved.

2. It appears from the maps available in the public library, maps that are to such a small scale as to be next to useless to the average person unused to maps and those with poor eyesight, that it is proposed to move this area into Belfast.

3. I wish to register my strongest opposition to this area being added to Belfast.

4. The problems associated with the Belfast area were considered in great detail in the 1950s with many bodies being involved, and the result was the establishment of the town of Newtownabbey. It is unclear how one commissioner can now undertake such a detailed study on his own and no evidence has been produced to show that reversing the decision of the early 1950s not to extend the Belfast boundary now has any major benefits.

5. I am unashamedly Protestant and Unionist. For this reason, I elected to live in the Castlereagh borough whose ethos is in line with my beliefs. Had I wanted to live in the area of a council strongly dominated by Nationalist and Catholics with beliefs so opposed to mine then I would have bought a house in Belfast. I fail to see the justice of a boundary commissioner simply setting my wishes in this regard aside and throwing me into a council largely composed of those of alien beliefs.

6. I have no affinity with the town of Belfast; I cannot recall when I was last in the centre of the town. All of the facilities I need are to hand here, with the sole exception of the BCH, which is not funded from the rates. Belfast has a large job culture with drinking, urinating on the streets and a general rowdiness at weekends and evenings that have no part in the life of the ratepayers here. Belfast also has problems with red-light districts that are totally alien to the beliefs of many Protestants. I see no benefit whatever from being joined with Belfast to counter the many adverse effects.

7. Belfast is already a fractious council and adding to this by appointing even more councillors will have a great adverse effect on the running of an already fractious council. If, on the other hand, the proposal is to retain the same number of councillors each to serve a larger area ward, then that will have a very adverse effect on local contact with the respective councillors and the consideration of local issues.

8. Belfast is a very profligate council, as witness the large bill on hospitality, one set to get even larger with a bigger council, and the money wasted on funding parades, out-door concerts and events, fire-works displays and the like, all of which are of benefit to only a small number of the ratepayers who have to pay the bills involved. Castlereagh had the lowest rate for many years, dropping to second-lowest only when the government appointed a commissioner. Belfast, on the other hand, has one of the highest rates. I fail to see what possible benefit to the ratepayers of this area would accrue from the suggested move as against the definite result that we will have to pay much more for the satisfactory level of service already provided by Castlereagh.

9. It is clear that the proposed changes have been arrived at purely to make a nice looking solution on the map and totally without regard to the effect on the ratepayers involved. My rates have doubled in the last five years as a result of new-labour policy of fleecing the citizens of Northern Ireland as recompense for the cost of the troubles to the treasury; it is set to rise by another 50% as a result of water-rates. Moving us into Belfast will raise them by another 50%. Where is the fairness and equality of that to the many pensioners living here? Clearly this is another plank in the new-labour tactic of overtaxing the old as a means of forcing us out of our homes. Where are we supposed to go? Why can the government not have waited a few years until we are all dead and the houses have come onto the property market instead of making the last few years of our lives such a misery of worry over where the money to pay these hugely inflated bills is to come from (this on top of huge rises in fuel costs and in electricity). It seems abundantly clear that one reason for proposing these changes is to raise the rates income to the already profligate Belfast council by adding a large slice of middle-class suburban properties. It is also clear that this move is a crude attempt to gerrymander the proposed new council by offsetting the proposed changes to the Nationalist areas of the Lisburn council area.

10. It is abundantly clear that these boundary changes are being forced through purely for political ends, that they have no benefit whatever on any front for the ratepayers of this area, and, when the effect of the greatly increased district rate is finally brought home to the homes involved, will result in great resentment against Belfast council and the government (although they seem impervious to resentment and will continue to be so while there are no votes to be courted in Belfast – I bet these changes would have never seen the light-of-day in England; yet again it seems that the people of NI are being used as guinea-pigs).

Dr M H Gould.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M H Gould', with a horizontal line underneath.