

**Local Government Boundaries Commissioner
for Northern Ireland**

Transcript Details					
	Assistant Commissioner			Ian McCafferty	
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**Assistant
Commissioner**

Good morning everybody. I want to introduce myself. My name is Ian McCafferty and I have been appointed Assistant Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for the review of this particular Mid Antrim District Council. I have been appointed by the Department of the Environment to conduct this hearing. At the outset I would like to stress that I am independent of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, Mr Dick Mackenzie. It is not my function to defend his recommendations. My role today is to listen to and consider the evidence put forward at the hearing, and then report my findings and recommendations to the Commissioner. My recommendations are to be made within four weeks of the close of the hearing. As far as the times of the hearing are concerned, we have up to two days available if needed. I intend to start at ten o'clock each morning and have a break for lunch between half twelve and half one and expect to wrap things up about four o'clock in the afternoon. Although it is scheduled for two days we may, depending on the numbers, wrap things up considerably more quickly than that.

As regards maps and documents, copies of the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations are available for inspection here, as are copies of the Procedural Guidance which governs the conduct of the hearing. There are also copies of the written representations relating to this District, which have been made to the Commissioner's Secretariat during the eight week consultation period, which ended on the twelfth of November.

I would like to point out that the hearing will be recorded and that a transcript will be made available on the Commissioner's website in due course. If anyone cannot access the website and wishes to have printed copies of the transcript, please leave your name and contact details with a member of the team here today.

There are maps on the display showing the eleven council model, the boundary proposals for the Local Government District and the adjacent Districts, and staff from the Land and Property Services are also on hand. Their role is to advise me on the detail of any boundary proposals brought forward at the hearing, and to assist any person making representations with mapping matters.

The purpose and scope of this hearing is to consider oral representations concerning the Provisional Recommendations of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for this government district of Mid Antrim. If you have a view on the Commissioner's recommendations, this is your opportunity to be heard. I should, however, emphasise that you cannot reserve your position to await my report. It will not be possible for you to make any written or oral submissions to me after this hearing has been concluded. I appreciate that some of you have already made written representations, I have had a look at those in preparing for today's meeting. Those of you who have made those written representations may want to elaborate on those today; however, it will not assist things just to simply repeat what is on paper already. Certainly use the opportunity to elaborate or stress any particular points or to clarify any particular points that you have made already. I would point out, above all, it is important that you try to back up your proposals with evidence where this is possible rather than simply relying on unsubstantiated statements, and bear in mind that in making his recommendations, the Commissioner was constrained by the rules set out in the relevant legislation and those rules are replicated at the back of the Procedural Guidance that you should have.

There are some issues that are outside the scope of today's hearing and I will run through those for clarity. These issues include: the number of new district councils; the grouping of the current councils from which they will be constituted; the location of any headquarters of new councils; any financial consequences of the boundary changes; and any subsequent District Electoral Areas into which the proposed wards will be combined; and city or borough status of new councils. Those matters are all outside the scope of today's hearing. Just for information, the city or borough status of councils is a matter for the Department of the Environment to address in bringing forward the legislation for the reorganisation of local government.

We only have two speakers so far and you have already indicated your preference and your wish to speak. In relation to the oral submissions, please start by stating your name, whether you are speaking in a personal capacity or if you are in a representative capacity, and if so whom are you representing. Speak clearly, try not to use abbreviations unless you explain the abbreviations or colloquialisms as they may cause difficulties for the transcribers. Also please indicate whether you have already made a written submission. If you have any further documents that you are speaking from that I

have not already been furnished with, it would be helpful if you could give a copy of those to my staff here. If you have not got a copy, please contact one of my staff and they will arrange a copy to be made for you.

When making your oral submission, it will be of particular assistance if you are able to explain the reasons why you have taken a particular position or view, any counter proposals which you may wish to make to the Commissioner's recommendations, and the reasons for these counter proposals. When you have finished your submissions, other people may wish to put questions to you and I may also have some questions for the purposes of clarification.

I would like to emphasise that I intend the hearing to be conducted in an informal manner. Formal cross-examination is, therefore, not appropriate. However, I am happy for people to put questions to the speaker through myself and, similarly, I will try to facilitate the person answering the question in the best possible way. The most important thing today is to hear relevant information in respect of the Commissioner's proposals, hear counter-proposals, and conduct the hearing as efficiently and effectively as possible. After today's hearing and tomorrow's hearing I may want to visit locations, site visits, to look in detail any proposals that have been put forward today.

I will be assisted in the running of this hearing by a team composed of staff from the following: the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner's Office; the Land and Property Service; and Morrow Communications. Please feel free to approach any of these staff with any queries you may have.

[Housekeeping announcement]

Normally at this point the guidance would be that we adjourn for a few minutes to allow everyone who has turned up to register. Any questions at this stage before we start with the oral presentations? Okay, in that case can I invite Michael Carchie Campbell to come forward.

**Michael C
Campbell**

My name's Michael Carchie Campbell. I am here representing the Alliance Party. You will have seen our initial submission. We do have a map for that. I do not know whether you have seen that or not?

**Assistant
Commissioner**

The map was not included with your submission.

**Michael C
Campbell**

The map was not included so if someone wants to take a copy of that so I will not reiterate that because it is already submitted. However, we do have some other suggestions, particularly regarding the villages of Broughshane and Ahoghill. We think it would be better if the whole of each of those villages would be in the same, in the wards called Broughshane or Ahoghill. Obviously in Broughshane's case that will have a knock-on effect on the proposed ward of Slemish at the southern end, and Ahoghill would impact on the proposed ward of Maine. That is the way it is.

The other two, turning to the Carrickfergus area, are the wards of Gortalee and Greenisland. We would suggest that the ward boundaries be changed, instead of running to the coast from the railway line, but to follow the railway line and come down sort of to the West of the factory. On page 264 of the map, we propose to move the boundary for Gortalee - you see it comes down, follows the railway line and then comes straight down there, to the coast. We propose moving that boundary to go further along, continue along the railway line and come down just before the factory coming out at Jointure Bay, where that is written. We suggest then a rename of the two wards to Greenisland Upper on the upper side of the railway line and Greenisland Lower. The whole of the area is Greenisland, it seems nonsensical to do it the other way.

The other area is Glenwhirry ward, which is page 262. It concerns the area below Big Collin, the mountain in the middle towards the bottom. It is in the townland of Tildarg. However, there is the road, Tildarg Road, which you can see running above all or to the north of the proposed boundary. We would recommend moving the local district boundary to come round over the top of the hill instead of where it is, to take in the houses that are on that road because you cannot get to that area without going through a different local government district. It is quite difficult to get to, and the people there look towards Ballyclare more than they would look towards Ballymena or Carrick or Larne. That is the only instance we would move the boundary and propose it go into Antrim and Newtonabbey.

**Assistant
Commissioner**

Thank you very much for that. Any questions from anyone else in the room in respect of those proposals?

[inaudible] ... Comment from the floor I'm sorry, I would need clarification – I did not hear you at the end, your proposal to keep what is it? ...

**Michael C
Campbell**

Glenwhirry ward is in Tildarg townland. There's a section of Tildarg Road that looks towards Ballyclare not towards Ballymena.

**Assistant
Commissioner**

If it helps, given the small number of participants here, we have maps both in hard copy and on line. If it helps the understanding we can adjourn for five minutes and gather round the maps.

ADJOURNMENT

Okay, thank you everybody for coming back to the meeting. We have had a short adjournment and we have had a look at the maps in some detail. As I said during my opening remarks, where possible any proposals or counterproposals need to be supported by evidence. The hearing continues this afternoon and tomorrow and at the end of that two-day period I can no longer take any representations. Speakers may wish to use that intervening period between now and tomorrow afternoon to do further research in respect of any proposals that they may wish to bring to the hearing. Whilst we have limited numbers this morning, the hearing will be taking place tomorrow. We have had registrations from two other parties, who cannot come today, who have intimated that they will be here tomorrow and will be making oral presentations. Are there any more comments in respect of the proposals put forward?

Monica Digney

Good morning, Monica Digney, Sinn Fein Ballymena. I am to take it that from previous proposals that there seems to be a problem with the Alliance, with the name where Broughshane and Ahoghill were going into a ward called Slemish and that seems to be problematic. We would actually think the opposite. We think that Slemish is a perfect name for it would encompass this whole area.

**Assistant
Commissioner**

I do not think that was the proposal. In fact, the proposals from my understanding is that the villages of Broughshane and Ahoghill are split between two respective wards and I think the proposals were that a part of Broughshane would be moved into the ward called Broughshane and a part of Ahoghill moved into the ward called Ahoghill. There may be

corresponding knock-on adjustments needed to keep the electorate in each ward approximately the same.

Monica Digney We would be totally opposed to that. We want the wards as is, we are quite happy with the way they are. I would certainly see problems if part of the Glenwhirry Ward was taken off and put in towards Antrim simply because this was made up in numbers, numbers which are probably not correct anyway, but, I would have great problems in that being taken off, that is part of the Ballymena area and I would strongly object to that.

Assistant Commissioner Okay, thank you. Anyone like to comment on those comments/proposals? Thank you. The next speaker is Mrs Geraldine McGahey, Chief Executive from Larne Borough Council.

Geraldine McGahey Good morning. Thank you very much for the opportunity to put some evidence before you. For the record my name is Geraldine McGahey. I am the Chief Executive of Larne Borough Council, and I am here at the request of Larne Borough Council to provide any additional evidence that you might require to supplement or support the evidence that we have already submitted to you in writing. At the outset, I would like to make a few observations, if I may, and encourage you to take them on board. We understand that there are certain comments that we might wish to make that would be outside your remit but, nonetheless, if you could bear with me I will explain why we wish to make those. The first point is in respect of the electorate figures, and we understand the remit and the legislative base that was given to the Commissioner in identifying ward boundaries and so on. However, the electorate that has been identified for the Larne Borough area is quoted as 21,477, yet the actual figure supplied to us on the third of November from the Electoral Office was 21,754. At the last opportunity to make representations to such a hearing, when the seven council structure was being considered, we also made the point at that time that there was no attempt to future proof the figures that were being submitted, and we understand that the Commissioner has to work on the evidence provided to him. However, the point that we made at that time is still very relevant in that there is a massive housing development taking place in Larne West which will increase the population of Larne by some 2500 people. That is currently nearing completion, and so within the next number of months the electorate population of Larne town alone will change dramatically. The evidence that is provided within the

Commissioner's report identifies that there will be 40 wards within the new council area that he refers to as Mid Antrim. That is broken down into twenty from Ballymena and nine from Larne and the remainder from Carrickfergus. The reality of it is that Ballymena loses four wards, and Carrick and Larne both lose six wards. However, the electorate population for each of the wards that is provided within the Commissioner's report on page 248 demonstrates quite clearly that the electorate population for the wards within the Ballymena council area are much smaller than those within the Larne or Carrick area. For example, within Larne, eight of the nine wards have electorate populations greater than 2400, with the exception of Islandmagee which has 2187, yet the average electorate for the ward is quoted at 2246. Ballymena's average would be just over 2000, so there is in our mind scope for the redistribution of the ward boundaries to allow a much more equitable distribution of wards and, therefore, elected representation for all of the areas that will not be to the detriment of any political party or any community but will indeed strengthen the community ethos that has been developed over many years in each of the wards. The written submission that was provided to you addressed a number of practical issues: whether it be the spelling or the name of a ward, or in a couple of cases a boundary issue, particularly in the likes of Cairncastle where it splits a village in two. That has been contained within our written submission and we have identified an amendment to that boundary. We do recognize that it might have some impact on the Carnlough and Glenarm ward, but all it will do will be to reduce the size of it. Local identity was identified as being at the heart of the Review of Public Administration and one of the things that government was keen to retain along with coterminosity. We believe that the ward proposals for Larne will cause some serious community identity issues. The one in Cairncastle is easily addressed, but the most serious for us would be in the Craigyhill area. Craigyhill and Anteville are presently two separate wards. There have been many intra-community issues between those two estates. The two estates branch off one main road, the Linn Road, and all of the statutory agencies since around 2001 have been trying to engender an ethos between the two communities that they should be one in terms of the sustainability of services and the provision of facilities. Much work has been done to create that and our proposal that that should be given some further strength has to some extent been taken on board. Anteville as a community has effectively been split and part of it now will be within the Craigyhill ward and the remainder of it, we think, is within Larne Centre.

The other issue that is of particular importance to our elected representatives is the issue of Glynn and Kilwaughter, where parts of those communities are being separated off into what is currently the Carrickfergus area. Again, the change in population that that will affect may not be that great, but the people who do live within the Kilwaughter area who are being transferred into Glenwhirry, or from the Glynn/Ballycarry area going into Woodburn, will experience a serious impact on their identity. They do not currently have any connection at all with the communities in that area, albeit that they are close to the boundary between two council areas. The only other issue that my council wished to identify to you apart from these general matters would be a further consideration of the District Electoral Areas. Whilst that is not part of your remit at the present time, we believe that the balance of the actual wards will have a serious impact on that. How those wards as are proposed might be grouped together will seriously impact on the ability to have a fair representation of the people of the Larne Borough within the new council area and it will impact on Carrickfergus as well, particularly given that our wards are dropping from fifteen down to nine, and yet we have an electorate in each of those wards that is substantially greater than the average. We would very much wish that the Commission would take that into account.

**Assistant
Commissioner**

Thank you. I have read in some detail your written submission, made on behalf of the Council, with interest over some of the historical spellings of names amongst other things. The Land and Property Services and I pulled out some old photographs yesterday, old documents relating to the spelling so it is something we will look at in great detail over the next few weeks. Thank you.

**Geraldine
McGahey**

Just one further point I should raise with you is in relation to the naming of the Council. Mid Antrim has no relevance to South and East Antrim. Our council would suggest at this time that it be considered as Mid and East Antrim or East and Mid Antrim, whichever would be the Commissioner's preference. We have no preference, but the new council should retain the right to be named more appropriately.

Assistant

Commissioner Thank you, yes. Any other comments or proposals? Thank you. If there are no other comments or proposals at this stage, I would adjourn the hearing until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning. Thank you. Good morning.

ENDS
