

Representation by Green Party to the proposal of the Boundary Commission for Local Government.

1. Before commenting on these proposed boundaries for the new local councils the Green Party would like to restate its opposition to the proposal to reduce the number of councils to eleven. We believe that this will effectively destroy local democracy and take the local out of local government. We believe that as Professor Colin Knox pointed out that the recent amalgamations of councils in Great Britain has led to a loss of any sense of shared identity and that these proposals will do the same. It is clear that these new larger councils lack local identity and are remote from the voter and will inevitably lead to a loss of public participation in the democratic process.

2. The proposals will reduce accessibility, accountability and civic leadership and are totally out of line with local government in other Western European democracies.

3. It would appear that the recommendations are the result of a number crunching exercise to achieve equal sized wards and take no account of traditional boundaries or long established communities.

4. For under the guidance set out by the Minister the proposals are as good as one would expect taking into account the absence of local identity.

5. With reference to North Down we wish to make the following points:

a) The name of the new Council should be North Down and Ards rather than Ards and North Down. Historically and traditionally, this has been the name when the two Local Authority Areas have been joined, for whatever purpose - e.g. North Down and Ards Institute, North Down and Ards Area Plan, North Down and Ards Telephone Directory, North Down and Ards Women's Aid, North Down and Ards Volunteer Bureau etc. There is no organisation known as Ards and North Down.

b) The southern boundary of the Loughview Ward, where it abuts the Belfast City Council Area, should be continued south along the Old Hollywood Road to its junction with the Knocknagoney Road, west along the Knocknagoney Road, across the Tillysburn Intersection and into the Hollywood Exchange, then North up the centre of the service road to join the Belfast / Loughview Boundary. This would continue to retain the Cedar Grove Development within the new Area, to which it has an affinity. It would also transfer the Hollywood Exchange Area into the new District, where it should logically lie.

c) There is a serious imbalance in the distribution of Wards within the new Council Area, so that most of the North Down Wards are over the average and most of the Ards Wards are under the average. As a result, the 20 Wards that are totally or overwhelmingly in the current Ards Council Area have a smaller electorate than the 19 that are wholly in North Down. It is totally unacceptable that North Down which has a higher electorate should effectively have 2 less wards than Ards.

d) The latter can be solved by one major change, which is to split / remove the Whitespots Ward, with the parts that are currently in Ards Borough Council being absorbed by the other Ards Wards, and the Conlig / Beechfield part forming part of a series of new Wards in Bangor. This would split the Wards along a more natural boundary and leave both North Down and Ards with 20 Wards each.

e) The proposed provisional Whitespots Ward does not seem a natural boundary to people in either North Down or Ards, as it joins the areas of Conlig / Beechfield which have always been linked in with part of Bangor, with a portion of the northern part of Newtownards Town around Beverley, which has traditionally been part of Ards Town.

f) The other Wards should be adjusted appropriately to ensure that the average population in the North Down Wards and the Ards Wards are similar.

In making these comments we still believe that the proposals for the Review of Public Administration has failed to achieve a balance between the need to provide efficient and effective service through economies of scale and the role of local authorities to provide democratic accountability and civic leadership.

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