

**REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARIES
COMMISSIONER FOR THE PROPOSED DISTRICT OF
LISBURN AND CASTLEREAGH**

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Section One: **Background and Statutory Framework**

Background

- 1.1 The commencement of the current Review of Local Government Boundaries in Northern Ireland was announced in a Public Notice on 03 February 2021 which explained the role and remit of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner and advised that in due course the Commissioner would publish Provisional Recommendations and may cause a public hearing to be held in each of the current eleven Local Government Districts. The Notice and a subsequent information video placed on the Commissioner's website (<https://www.lgbc-ni.org.uk/>) explained the process and the opportunities for participation in the consultation on the Provisional Recommendations.
- 1.2 The terms of the Review are set out in Article 50 and Schedule 4 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 1972 as amended. Copies of the legislative framework are available on the Commissioner's website.
- 1.3 The Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations with proposed boundaries and names of 11 Districts and their 462 constituent wards were published on the Commissioner's website on 27 July 2021 and announced by way of Public Notice, inviting comments on the proposals made. The consultation was launched on Citizen Space to enable ease of public inspection and maximum public participation. Accessibility points for online access to the Proposals and the consultation portal was facilitated at public facilities including Council premises and public libraries by the Commissioner's team in partnership with local councils and with Libraries Northern Ireland. Hard copies of any part of the Proposals or the associated maps as required by any person were made available on request. Other accessibility requirements were promoted on the Commissioners website including language translation, braille and sign language.
- 1.4 The consultation portal was open for 8 weeks and closed on 21 September. Details of the programme of public hearings was notified by press release, social media channels and on the Commissioner's website in September 2021.
- 1.5 The Commissioner received seven (7) representations in respect of the proposals for the District of Lisburn and Castlereagh. All representations received were acknowledged and have been made available for inspection on the Commissioner's website.
- 1.6 I was appointed as an Assistant Commissioner by The Department of Communities on 01 August 2021. My task is to gather, assess and report on the representations made in relation to this proposed District of Lisburn and Castlereagh and to submit a report to the Commissioner including my conclusions and recommendations, within 4 weeks of the end of the relevant

public hearing. I conducted a public hearing in this proposed District at Lagan Valley Island on 1st October 2021.

- 1.7 The Public Hearing was staged under the requirements of government guidance and observance of public health recommendations in respect of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Numbers in the room at any one time was limited to 20 persons with alternative participation facilitated by a simultaneous online interactive platform.

Written Representations

- 1.8 Written representations of relevance to this District are listed in Section Seven, Part One of this report. All written representations were considered by me in advance of the public hearing and in anticipation of the preparation of this Report.

Public Hearing

- 1.9 The Public Hearing on the Provisional Proposals was attended by eleven people, ten of whom attended in person with one attending via an online platform. The hearing was facilitated in an informal and accessible manner where all participants were afforded the opportunity to give their views and to question the submissions and viewpoints expressed by others. Participants were asked to either identify as individuals or representatives of an organisation. The list of organisations represented is at Section Seven, Part Two.

My Report

- 1.10 This report presents and addresses the written and oral views of interested parties in respect of the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations for the proposed District of Lisburn and Castlereagh. In particular it addresses the relevant local information and opinion about the boundaries and names of the District and its wards. I have set out details of support of the Commissioner's proposals and objections and/or counter-proposals. I have also set out my conclusions on the issues raised which are permissible matters for consideration under the legislative framework of this Review. Any matters submitted that are not relevant or permissible considerations under the legislative parameters of the Review have been outlined in this report as having been submitted, but those issues will not have formed part of my deliberations. It should be noted that in the parts of this report where the name 'Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council' is used, that this is not the official legislative council name.
- 1.11 As part of my research for this report I have studied and tested any areas of the District where alternative boundaries have been proposed by use of GIS

mapping systems of the Land and Property Services of Northern Ireland. This has been facilitated by the staff of Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland and I am indebted to their technical assistance.

Section Two: District Boundaries

- 2.1 The Commissioner's approach to the District boundary line is one of minimum intervention unless there is a compelling reason to do so. There have been no objections to this approach in this District, with strong support expressed for the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations in relation to the District Boundary.
- 2.2 It is observed however, that a written submission from Belfast City Council in relation to the proposals for the Belfast City Council area requests a change at two locations, one of which would have the effect of changing the boundary with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council.
- 2.3 I have read the Belfast City Council submission, and have noted the points made in relation to their request for review of the boundary at Galwally ward and around the Forestside area. My comments in relation to this submission are limited to its potential impact on Lisburn and Castlereagh, as I have not considered the Commissioner's recommendations for the Belfast City area.
- 2.4 It is my view that the overriding consideration in relation to deliberation of this issue must be that this particular boundary was agreed by the NI Assembly, and was a robustly debated political decision. To open up a further debate on this part of the boundary would 'unpick' this decision, unravelling the decisions made on the number, size and boundaries of councils further to the Review of Local Government, with the possible consequence of destabilizing local government for quite some time.
- 2.5 The Belfast City Council submission notes that the definition of Local Government Districts is premised on achieving greater efficiency in the delivery of services, in terms of securing better value for money and quality of service. The representations made to me at the Public Hearing were unanimous in their concern regarding the potential impact of the suggested change for the sustainability of Lisburn and Castlereagh.
- 2.6 I would contend that efficiency and sustainability is a concern for all councils, and recommend that the Commissioner should take a balanced approach to this issue.
- 2.7 The Belfast City Council area is surrounded on all sides by other councils that form part of the wider metropolitan area, with radial infrastructure extending beyond the Belfast area. While Belfast City Council in its submission, notes the aspiration to be the 'regional driver of growth' and expresses concerns regarding population loss to neighbouring council areas, it is notable that only one specific location (other than the Harbour area) has been singled out for requested inclusion within the Belfast City Council area.
- 2.8 It is my view that a compelling case for change has not been made, and so I recommend that the Commissioner's proposal for the District line is affirmed.

- 2.9 In a submission made by one participant, the proposal was put forward that the District boundary at Glencregagh Road should be moved to bring both sides of the road into the same council area. On examination, there was no suitable alternative 'readily identifiable feature' along which to run this boundary, which also forms part of the boundary at Galwally/Forestside and is therefore subject to the same caveat re political agreement.
- 2.10 It is my view therefore that in response to this counterproposal, a compelling case for change has not been made and so I recommend that the Commissioner's proposal for the District line is again affirmed.
- 2.11 In a submission made by an individual on Citizen Space, counterproposals were put forward to bring both Ballynahinch and Moneyreagh into the Lisburn and Castlereagh district, but there was insufficient detail given to enable consideration of these ideas.
- 2.12 It is my view therefore that in response to these counterproposals, a compelling case for change has not been made and so I recommend that the Commissioner's proposal for the District line is again affirmed.

Section Three: **Ward Boundaries**

- 3.1 A number of representations were made at the public hearing in relation to the Commissioner's provisional recommendations for the boundary between Ballymacoss ward and White Mountain ward. While some of these submissions were made on grounds outwith the scope of this review (such as impact on District Electoral Area, or impact on the perceived political identity of the electorate in the area), a strong objection was made in terms of the council's engagement and community building activity with the community in Ballymacoss ward.
- 3.2 The suggestion was made that to 'hive off' a piece of a housing estate by moving the boundary to Rathvarna Drive would be counterproductive to what the council is trying to achieve in the area. A counterproposal to the Commissioner's provisional recommendations was put forward to instead move the boundary to a nearby main road, in the 'triangle' between Prince William Road, Nettlehill Road and Ballymacash Road.
- 3.3 A similar objection was made in relation to the Commissioner's recommendations by another participant in the hearing, on the basis of a 'main road' being a more identifiable boundary line than the current recommendation.
- 3.4 Since the hearing I visited the area to assess the validity of the counterproposal, and sought advice from OSNI to assess the potential outcome in relation to number of electors, if the boundary was moved to the Ballymacash Road (from Prince William Road to the junction with Nettlehill Road).
- 3.5 Bearing in mind the high number of electors in Ballymacoss and neighbouring wards and the potential for establishing an electorate in a ward that is more than 10% above the ward average, I also requested that OSNI investigate the potential for moving the ward boundary between Knockmore and Ballymacoss from Ayrshire Avenue to Ayrshire Drive, as a potential way of better balancing the electorate numbers. The housing around Ayrshire Drive is much newer, and likely to have a less established community than in the Ballymacash estate. The Commissioner had, within her Provisional Recommendations, already proposed changes to that boundary without objection.
- 3.6 Information from OSNI was as follows:

LCCC re-working with AC on 20211014

Transfer of electors to Ballymacoss Ward from White Mountain Ward, using Ballymacash Road (red line) as the new boundary would affect 198 electors (highlighted in blue).

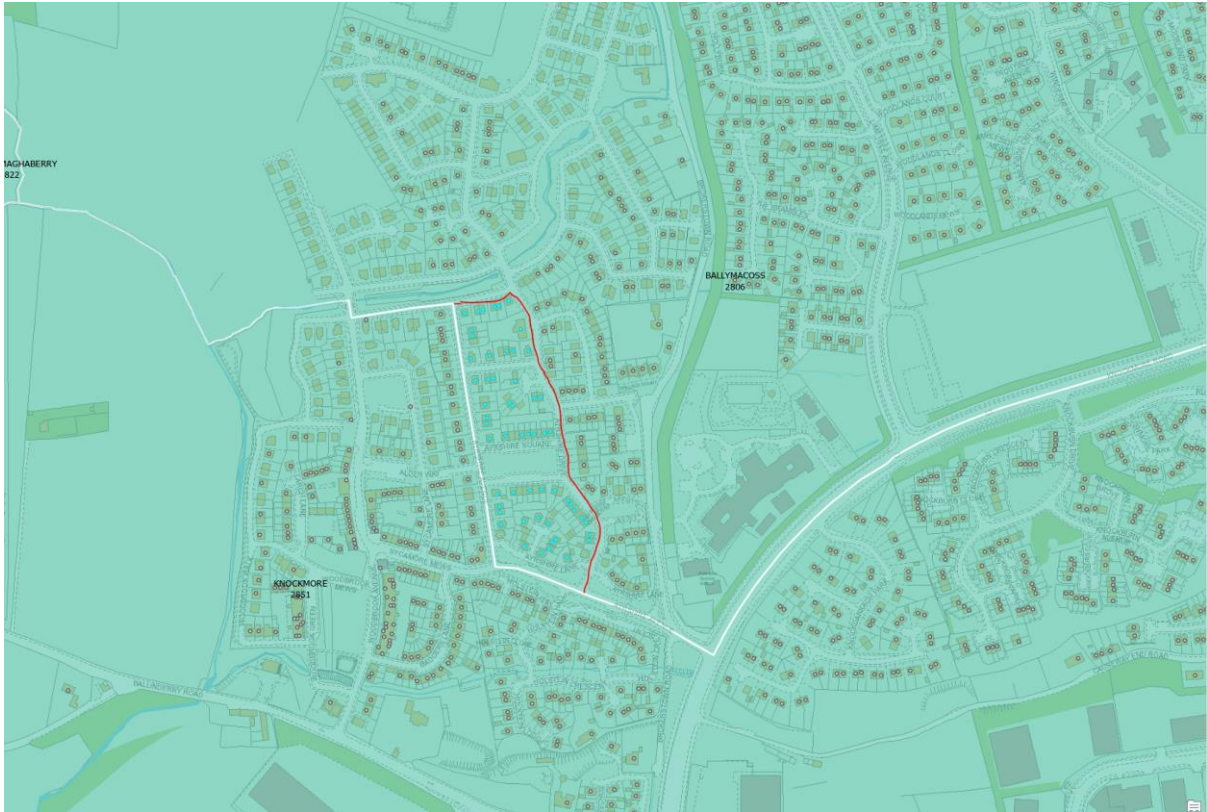
New electorate would be:

Ballymacoss Ward: $2806 + 198 = 3004$
White Mountain Ward: $2839 - 198 = 2641$



Regarding the balancing for above by transfer of electors to Knockmore Ward from Ballymacoss Ward, using Ayrshire Drive (red line) as the new boundary would affect 97 electors (highlighted in blue).

New electorate would be:
Knockmore Ward: $2851 + 97 = 2948$
Ballymacoss Ward: $3004 - 97 = 2907$



These changes are based on amending the Provisional Proposals put forward by the Commissioner.

Final electorate based on above transfers:

Ballymacoss ward: 2907

White Mountain ward: 2641

Knockmore ward: 2948

LCCC ward average is 2612 (+/- 10% range is 2351-2875).

- 3.7 These counter proposals have merit as a 'readily identifiable boundary' but are not achievable within the +/-10% range, as the Ballymacoss ward would reach +11.3% and the Knockmore ward, 12.8%.
- 3.8 After analyzing the merits of these counter proposals under the requirements of the legislation, I am of the view that although the proposed changes do not sit within the +/-10% range, they *do* meet the required balancing of electors within each ward as being 'substantially the same', particularly when having regard to the physical diversity of the district.
- 3.9 I therefore conclude that these suggested alternatives to the Commissioner's proposed line are preferred and recommend that these should be affirmed,

i.e. moving the proposed boundaries for Ballymacoss from Rathvarna Drive to Ballymacash Road and from Ayrshire Avenue to Ayrshire Drive.

- 3.10 A further concern was expressed by a participant about potential boundary changes to the Carryduff East ward, to the south of Carryduff around the Killynure area. There do not appear to be any proposed changes to the boundaries in that particular part of Carryduff East, and the participant agreed that he was supportive of the boundary 'as is'.

Section Four: **Names of District and/or wards**

- 4.1 There were no specific proposals raised in this District regarding the naming of the District or any of its wards (notwithstanding the example below). I therefore have no recommendations to make in relation to naming of the District or Wards. I am aware that there has been a wider representation across the whole Review in terms of the adoption of a bilingual or trilingual naming policy for the whole map of the Local Government Districts and Wards in Northern Ireland. This is a matter for wider consideration by the Commissioner rather than a local or District-specific issue.
- 4.2 One written submission contained commentary about 'native place names' noting that "The vibrancy and heritage of these ward names can be found in an example below in Lios na gCearrbhach agus An Caisleán Riabhach: Moira – Maigh Rath – (meaning – the 'plain of streams' or 'plain of wheels')", however no particular proposal was made to change the name, and no evidence of community support was provided.

Section Five: **Other Issues**

- 5.1 A number of issues were raised with me which are not relevant or permissible considerations. I have listed these below:

The impact of ward boundary delineation on DEAs (District Electoral Areas).

- 5.2 A number of the submissions made at the hearing described locations in terms of District Electoral Areas rather than wards, requiring detailed clarification to ensure a common understanding of the areas under discussion, and to assess whether the submission was requesting consideration of an issue that was in scope of this review. DEAs are important to council strategy but they will be subject to their own Review process immediately following the settlement of new Ward Boundaries.
- 5.3 Concerns were expressed, including on Citizen Space, regarding the following DEAs: Killultagh/Lisburn South, Lisburn North/Lisburn South, Castlereagh East/Castlereagh South, with support for Lisburn North remaining 'as is'.

Rates revenue

- 5.4 All of those making submissions at the hearing included commentary in relation to the Belfast CC written submission regarding the Belfast City / Lisburn and Castlereagh boundary. There was a marked focus on the impact the change proposed by Belfast would have on the rates revenue for Lisburn and Castlereagh, and consequently on the future sustainability of the council. Much was made of the potential impact of change to the businesses in Forestside, the likely increase in rates bills for and sustainability of these businesses. Rates issues are outwith the scope of this Review.

Issues relating to perceived religious or political identity of the electorate in an area

- 5.5 A number of statements of this nature were made by one participant at the hearing. Again, considerations of this nature are outwith the scope of this review.

Location of retail, industrial or commercial property

- 5.6 Most of those making submissions at the public hearing paid a great deal of attention to the location of the Forestside retail complex, and the perceived reasoning behind the Belfast City Council proposal to change the boundary at Galwally Ward (Belfast). Concern was also expressed by one participant in relation to rumours of a similar proposal in relation to a change of the boundary at Derriaghy/ Dunmurry, again affecting a large quantity of retail/commercial property. At the time of the hearing, no evidence was available in relation to such a proposal.

Section Six: **Summary of Conclusions**

District Boundary

- 6.1 I conclude that no compelling case has been made for change to the District boundary. I therefore recommend that the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations be affirmed.

Ward Boundaries

- 6.2 I conclude that valid counterproposals to the Commissioner's proposed boundaries have been put forward in relation to the boundary of Ballymacoss Ward at Rathvarna Drive and Ayrshire Avenue, and although not within the +/- 10% range, the suggested changes provide a suitable alternative to the Commissioner's recommended boundaries, enabling a balance of electorate numbers that is substantially the same, and having regard to the size, population and physical diversity of the district.
- 6.3 I therefore recommend that the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations for all ward boundaries in the Lisburn and Castlereagh area be affirmed, with the exception of the Ballymacoss ward, where the proposed changes should be affirmed, as outlined in my report.

Names of District and/or Wards

- 6.4 There being no specific issues raised in this District regarding the naming of the District or any of its wards, I therefore have no recommendations to make in relation to naming of the District or Wards.
- 6.5 The wider representation across the whole Review in terms of the adoption of a bilingual or trilingual naming policy for the whole map of the Local Government Districts and Wards in Northern Ireland is a matter for wider consideration by the Commissioner rather than a local or District-specific issue.

Section Seven: **References and List of Submissions**

Part One: **List of Written Submissions**

1. Director, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
2. Committee for the Administration of Justice and Conradh na Gaeilge
3. Individual
4. Individual
5. Lisburn and Castlereagh Councillor
6. Individual
7. Chief Executive, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
8. NI Place-name Project

Part Two: **Oral Submissions at Public Hearing**

1. Lisburn and Castlereagh Councillor (Independent)
2. Lisburn and Castlereagh Councillor (Ulster Unionist)
3. Lisburn and Castlereagh Officers (2) joint submission, supplemented by further written submission
4. Lisburn and Castlereagh Councillor
5. Lisburn and Castlereagh Councillor (Alliance Party)
6. Lisburn and Castlereagh Councillor (Alliance Party)
7. Lisburn and Castlereagh Councillor
8. Lisburn and Castlereagh Councillor
9. Lisburn and Castlereagh Councillor (Democratic Unionist Party)
10. Mayor of Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council

Section Eight: **Appendices**

Appendix A: Post-hearing written submission from Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council officials received 04 Oct. 21 available at <https://www.lgbc-ni.org.uk/consultation-responses> .