

**REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARIES
COMMISSIONER FOR THE PROPOSED DISTRICT OF
NEWRY, MOURNE and DOWN**

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October 2021

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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 3rd 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 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 27th 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 21st September 2021. 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 six written representations in respect of the proposals specifically applicable to the District of Newry, Mourne & Down.
- 1.6 All representations received were acknowledged and have been made available for inspection on the Commissioner's website.
- 1.7 I was appointed as an Assistant Commissioner by The Department of Communities on 1st August 2021. My task is to gather, assess and report on the representations made in relation to this proposed District of Newry, Mourne & Down 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 Canal Court Hotel, Newry on 29th September 2021.
- 1.8 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

- 1.9 Written representations of relevance to this District are listed in Section Seven 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

- 1.10 The Public Hearing on the Provisional Proposals was attended by zero people in attendance, either 'in person' or in attendance via the online platform. The plan for the hearing was to facilitate in an informal and accessible manner where all participants would be afforded the opportunity to give their views and to question the submissions and viewpoints expressed by others. Participants would have been asked to either identify as individuals or representatives of an organisation. However, as there were zero attendees, there was no requirement to follow this planned process. The public hearing opened at 10.15am on 29th September 2021 and was adjourned, pending any 'walk-in' attendees. However, there were zero attendees so the hearing was closed without any further submissions on this date.

My Report

- 1.11 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 Newry, Mourne & Down. 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 to be given 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.
- 1.12 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 or counter proposals to this approach in this District and so I recommend that the Commissioner's proposal for the District line is affirmed.

Section Three: **Number and Boundaries of Wards**

- 3.1 There were no proposals to alter any of the suggested Ward Boundaries as laid out in the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations and as such, I conclude that the Commissioner's proposed Ward Boundary lines in Newry, Mourne & Down are preferred and recommend that they should be affirmed.
- 3.2 Further, Section 4.9 of the LGBC - Provisional Recommendations 2021-2022 Review states:
- In the 2008/09 Review Commissioner Mackenzie CB created 41 wards in.....Newry, Mourne and Down. In formulating these provisional recommendations, I have considered these increases, and I am of the view that both are and continue to be desirable in those Districts. I am not persuaded at this stage that any other or further increase or decrease of the number of wards in any district is desirable.
- 3.3 There were no proposals to alter the number of wards as laid out in the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations and as such, I conclude that the Commissioner's proposed number of wards in Newry, Mourne & Down are preferred and recommend that they should be affirmed.

Section Four: Names of District and Wards

- 4.1 Section 5.6 of the LGBC - Provisional Recommendations 2021-2022 Review states:
I have received a number of representations stating that the District name for Newry, Mourne and Down should be Newry, Mourne, South Armagh and Down. I have not included either in my provisional recommendations; I would invite further representations on both in the course of the wider public consultation that is now open.
- 4.2 Prior to the publication of the LGBC - Provisional Recommendations 2021-2022 Review, a small number of submissions were received that suggested a District name change. However, there were no further representations received in either the written consultation submissions invited during the wider public consultation or during the Public Hearing held on 29th September 2021 in relation to the proposed changing of the District name. I would therefore conclude that there is no compelling evidence to suggest a District name change at this stage.
- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 Section 5.5 of the LGBC - Provisional Recommendations 2021-2022 Review states:
I have to date received a representation that both districts and wards should be named in Irish or bilingually with English or in a trilingual naming convention with both English and Ulster Scots. I have not included this in my provisional recommendations; I would invite further representations on this issue in the course of the wider public consultation that is now open.
- 4.5 From the written consultation responses received, the vast majority of respondents expressed a general view either in support of or against the naming of wards and related signage in bi-lingual (English & Irish) or tri-lingual (English, Irish & Ulster Scots). Of these, there were general submissions received:
Support for bi-lingual wards and signage x 57
Support for tri-lingual wards and signage x 2
Against wards and signage in anything other than English x 59
- 4.6 Clearly, given the almost equal balance of conflicting opinion, this is a divisive matter which would require a separate consultation, outside the remit of this current process.
- 4.7 From the written consultation responses received, there were also several submissions of a more specific nature in relation to the District of Newry, Mourne and Down. These were:

- One proposal to either keep ward names as they are or change them to a bi-lingual approach to include English & Ullans;
- One proposal that due to the linguistic heritage of the area and the increasing use of Irish in the District that bi-lingual (Irish & English) ward names should be implemented; and
- Four proposals from local respondents to request that ward names, townlands and road signs in the District be named in Irish/nGaelige as well as in English – this included one submission with a specific reference to the vibrancy and heritage of these ward names which can be found in the example:
Crossmaglen – Crois Mhic Lionnáin – (meaning - Mac Lionnáin’s crossroads).

4.8 In addition, a number of general responses were received by email and these included two submissions against bi-lingual signage as well as one submission from Foras na Gaeilge that recommended both districts and wards should be named in Irish or bilingually with English.

4.9 All consultation and email responses are available to view at [Consultation Responses | Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for Northern Ireland \(lgbc-ni.org.uk\)](https://www.lgbc-ni.org.uk/consultation-responses)

Section Five: **Other Issues**

- 5.1 There were no additional issues raised during either the wider public consultation or the public hearing which need to be considered as either permissible or non-permissible considerations.

Section Six: **Summary of Conclusions**

District Boundary

- 6.1 With no objections or counter proposals submitted via the wider public consultation or during the public hearing held at Canal Court Hotel, Newry on 29th September 2021, I reaffirm the Commissioner's recommendation that the district boundary line should remain unchanged.

Number and boundaries of wards

- 6.2 With no objections or counter proposals submitted via the wider public consultation or during the public hearing held at Canal Court Hotel, Newry on 29th September 2021, I reaffirm the Commissioner's recommendation that the district should remain comprised of 41 wards as detailed in table 10 on pages 47 & 48 of the LGBC - Provisional Recommendations 2021-2022 Review - accessible at <https://www.lgbc-ni.org.uk/publications/provisional-recommendations-report> which lists the ward names and their electorates; and that the ward boundary changes as outlined in section 7.9.6 and the proposed new electorate per ward 7.10.4 (page 46 of the LGBC - Provisional Recommendations 2021-2022 Review) should remain as outlined in the report.

Names of Districts and/or Wards

- 6.3 I would conclude that there is no compelling evidence to suggest a District name change at this stage. Further, I would conclude that there is no evidence to suggest any changes to names of Wards at this stage.
- 6.4 Given the amount of respondents that expressed a general viewpoint on the issue of bi-lingual or tri-lingual District and Ward names, I would reaffirm the Commissioner's view that there needs to be a further process 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.

Section Seven: References and List of Submissions

Part One: List of Written Submissions ¹

1. Individual: The names of local government wards should be kept as they are presently or changed to bilingual wards with the ward name in both English and Ullans.
2. Individual: As one of the many Irish speakers in this district, I think the names of the wards should appear bilingually, both in English and in Irish. This would better reflect the linguistic heritage of the area and also the increasing use of Irish by people of all ages and backgrounds.
3. Individual: Ba mhian liom go mbeadh na hainmeacha i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla. I would prefer if the names used were in both Irish and English
4. Organisation: We strongly believe that every area should have their townland and road sign names published in Gaeilge. In an area where we are doing our best to improve the recognition and give it the publicity it deserves we strongly urge the government to consider providing this for all areas.
5. Individual: I believe that due attention and prominence be given to the native place names as part of this ongoing consultation on local Government Boundaries. The vibrancy and heritage of these ward names can be found in an example below in An Iúir, Múrna agus An Dún: Crossmaglen – Crois Mhic Linnáin – (meaning - Mac Linnáin's crossroads)
6. Individual: I would like official recognition of the Irish language place names in Newry, Mourne and Down, for the reasons outlined in the 'additional comments' section: Official recognition of the Irish place names in Newry, Mourne and Down is of the utmost importance. As well as preserving our heritage for its own sake, old place names can offer us a clue as to how the land should be managed for everyone's benefit. This will only grow in importance as we respond to climate change and other challenges. Take, for instance, a housing development built in Galway at 'Bun na hAbhainn' which began flooding badly after three or four years. If knowledge of place names had been more widely known, the developers might have thought twice about building at 'The Bottom of the River'! Thank you for taking the time to read these comments, Is mise, le meas [Redacted]

Part Two: Oral Submissions at Public Hearing

None received at Public Hearing (29th September 2021)

¹ Note submissions listed below relate to specific submissions relevant to the District of Newry, Mourne and Down and do not include general submissions. Responses received to the consultation on the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations through the online portal after close on 21st September 2021.

Section Eight: **Appendices**

8.1 There are no Appendices to this Report.