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# A Guide to Public Hearings

September 2021

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### Local Government Boundaries Review 2021/2022

1. A programme of eleven public hearings will be conducted by Assistant Commissioners at the end of September and start of October 2021, one in each district area. Each hearing is scheduled to last for up to four hours depending upon the number of persons or organisations wishing to make oral representations, with online and in person access. If required, the Assistant Commissioner may decide to hold a further session. It is within the Assistant Commissioner's discretion to adjourn and reconvene a hearing.
2. Any interested person or organisation may attend in person or send a representative to make known their views on the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations, whether or not they have previously submitted written representations to the Commissioner. All those in attendance (in person and online) will be asked to advise upon booking whether they wish to speak at the hearing.
3. To ensure compliance with ongoing measures in place for indoor meetings as a result of the ongoing public health restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, those interested parties wishing to attend any of the district hearings are asked to register their attendance in advance, via an online booking form or email which is available on the LGBC website [www.lgbc-ni.org.uk/public-hearings](http://www.lgbc-ni.org.uk/public-hearings). Whilst every effort will be made to accommodate persons attending who have not booked in advance, this will be determined by the safe capacity of the venue.
4. The Commissioner will not attend the hearings, but members of the Secretariat and officers from Ordnance Survey NI will be present to assist with the procedure, arrangements, and mapping queries.
5. No statutory procedure is prescribed for the conduct of a hearing. This is a matter for the discretion of the Commissioner and Assistant Commissioners, but the intention is that the

hearings will be informal. A transcript of proceedings will be produced. The purpose of a hearing is to:

- (a) ascertain relevant local information and opinion;
  - (b) hear comment on the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations;
  - (c) receive any counter-proposals;
  - (d) enable everyone attending on line or in person who wishes to comment on any of these matters the opportunity to do so; and
  - (e) provide evidence from which the Assistant Commissioners may compile a report with conclusions and recommendations to the Commissioner.
6. At the opening of a hearing, the Assistant Commissioner will advise on the conduct of proceedings and agree the order in which persons will be invited to speak.
7. Those speaking will be invited to state their name and declare any position of authority or relevant interest. This not only helps others at the hearing, but materially assists those preparing a transcript of proceedings. Speakers will be invited to speak distinctly, be brief and to the point and explain any abbreviations used.
8. The Assistant Commissioners accept written submissions in languages other than English, however public hearing events will be conducted in English. In the event of simultaneous translation, interpreter or signer facilities being required at a hearing, advance notice should be given to the Secretariat, at least one week before the commencement of the hearing to allow for appropriate arrangements to be made.
9. Proposals submitted to the Commissioner in writing in advance of a hearing will be published on the LGBC website. These will include all written submissions, schemes and maps. It is helpful for the smooth running of a hearing for anyone wishing to make elaborate or substantial proposals, which have not been submitted to the Commissioner

in advance, to disclose this intention at the beginning of the hearing. It is also helpful for the Assistant Commissioner to be provided with copies of such proposals, including any written submissions, schemes or maps, and for copies to be made available to those preparing a transcript of proceedings. This helps in the production of an accurate transcript and it gives others attending the hearing the opportunity to study and comment on the counter-proposals. The hearing may be adjourned for a short while, if the Assistant Commissioner deems it necessary, in order to allow time for consideration to be given to complex proposals.

10. Other persons wishing to make written submissions or to read out written statements are also asked to e-mail copies of their submission or statements to the Assistant Commissioner. After the Assistant Commissioner has heard each speaker or group of speakers, further clarification of points raised may be required to ensure that all views are accurately and properly recorded.
  
11. It is for the Assistant Commissioner to decide what information or opinions are relevant to the hearing, in accordance with the legislation. Representations or proposals may be discussed at the discretion of the Assistant Commissioner. Matters outside the scope of the hearing should not be discussed.
  
12. The Assistant Commissioner will want to ensure that those speaking are not repeating identical points already put to the hearing. The Assistant Commissioner is therefore unlikely to allow repetition, preferring that submissions are combined or that those speaking should merely record their support for views expressed previously.
  
13. The Assistant Commissioners will also want to ensure that the arguments being put to them are based on fact rather than anecdote. Speakers will be expected to back up any assertions with evidence.

14. When a hearing has closed and a transcript of proceedings has been completed, the Assistant Commissioner is required to prepare and submit a report directly to the Commissioner within four weeks. The Assistant Commissioner may comment on any representation or submission, or on the Commissioner's proposals, or on any other proposals. The Assistant Commissioner may recommend that the Commissioner's proposals be accepted, as they stand or with alterations, or he/she may recommend that a different proposal be adopted, with or without modifications, provided that it conforms to the legislative framework.