



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Local Government Boundaries
Date:	24th October, 2008
Reporting Officer:	Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services
Contact Officer:	Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services

Purpose of Report

To bring to the Members' attention the release of the provisional recommendations of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.

Background

The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner has released his recommendations on the new Local Government Boundaries in the Province.

He has proposed 11 Council areas with the undernoted names:

1. Belfast City Council
2. Derry City and Strabane District Council
3. Armagh and City and Bann District Council
4. Lisburn City and Castlereagh District Council
5. Newry City and Down District Council
6. Antrim and Newtownabbey District Council
7. Ards and North Down District Council
8. Causeway Coast District Council
9. Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
10. Mid Antrim District Council
11. Mid Ulster District Council

The number of wards, and therefore Councillors, in each District, with the exception of Belfast, is 40. The number in Belfast is 60. The total number of Councillors will be 460, which represents a reduction of 122.

Belfast

The Commissioner has recommended that the boundary of the Belfast City Council Local Government District should reflect the City's natural setting within the surrounding hills, a number of landscape features and several major roads. He has proposed that:

9 localities – Gilnahirk, Tullycarnet, Braniel, Castlereagh, Merok, Cregagh, Wynchurch, Glencreagh and Belvoir – be transferred from the current Castlereagh Borough Council area into Belfast;

6 localities – Collin Glen, Poleglass, Lagmore, Twinbrook, Kilwee and Dunmurray – be transferred from the existing Lisburn City Council area into Belfast; and

1 small area of housing at Knocknagoney be transferred from the existing North Down Borough Council area to Belfast.

I have attached to the report a map showing in yellow the areas to be included within the new Belfast boundary. These changes would increase the population of the City to 318,000, with the eligible electorate rising by 32,000 to 190,000.

Consultation Process

The Commissioner is seeking views on all aspects of his provisional recommendations, including the boundaries and the names of the new Local Government Districts and the number, boundaries and names of the wards making up each District. Written comments are sought by 12th November, 2008. Following that there will be a series of public hearings in each of the new Local Government Districts, with the Belfast hearings scheduled for 20th and 21st November in Malone House commencing at 10.00 a.m. Thereafter the Commissioner will submit his final recommendations to the Department of the Environment by June, 2009. These will be laid before the Assembly for approval.

Issues for consideration by Belfast City Council

In addition to the obvious political issues relating to revised Local Government boundaries, there are other issues which will have to be considered:

- the resource implications for services such as refuse collection and street cleansing;
- the potentially significant increase in the Council's demographic profile in terms of TSN areas; and
- the impact on leisure provision.

Resource implications

Whilst it is certain that there will be significant financial implications arising from the expansion of the boundary of the city in terms of the potential impact on its rate base, both domestic and commercial, this impact has not been quantified yet. Any consideration of the impact of the proposed changes to the city's boundary would need to be set within the context of the expansion of Council services into the merging areas and the potential requirement for new facilities.

Furthermore, the reconfiguration of the local government boundaries may result in the Council taking ownership of additional areas of open space and/or facilities (e.g. community, leisure). Again, an assessment will need to be undertaken to identify such facilities, examine fitness for purpose and to quantify the potential capital/revenue implications for the Council.

Such consideration will be taken forward within the context of the Council's ongoing work in regard to the rates and the continued engagement within the wider Review of Public Administration process. Further reports will be submitted, for the consideration of the Committee, in due course.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to consider whether the Council should prepare a corporate response to the Commissioner's provisional recommendations or whether responses should more appropriately be left to the individual Political Parties.

This page has been intentionally left blank.