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Revised Recommendations 2021-2022 Review

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Chapter 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents my Revised Recommendations for the Review of Local Government Boundaries in Northern Ireland. These Revised Recommendations will now be the subject of a further period of public consultation for six weeks.
- 1.2 I was appointed by the Department for Communities (DfC) as Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for Northern Ireland in June 2020. My task is to review and make recommendations in respect of the number, boundaries and names of the 11 local government districts and the number, boundaries and names of the wards into which each district is divided. The Department has directed me to submit my final recommendations by 31 May 2022.
- 1.3 On 1st August 2021 the Department appointed 5 Assistant Commissioners to assist me with my Review. The primary role of the Assistant Commissioners will be to consider written and oral representations made in respect of my Provisional Recommendations and to provide impartial advice to me.
- 1.4 The initial period of public consultation, on my Provisional Recommendations, ran from 27th July until 21st September 2021. Eleven public hearings were held in September and October, each chaired by an Assistant Commissioner.
- 1.5 I have endeavoured to make this Review as accessible and inclusive as possible. I am presenting these Recommendations in an accessible digital format that has been developed by colleagues in Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland (OSNI). This approach is not only in response to the current public health situation, but also because I am of the view that the quality of the digital maps is far superior to a printed version and this will allow everyone to examine my proposals in detail. I am encouraged by the positive feedback that I have received about this approach in response to my Provisional Recommendations.

Chapter 2. Legislative Framework

- 2.1 This chapter sets out the legislative framework for my Review. The parameters of the Local Government Boundaries Review and the procedures for the Review that I must follow are set out in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.
- 2.2 I was appointed under Part IV of the above act, Article 50 Paragraph (1) (b). Part IV of the Act provides that:
- The function of a Commissioner appointed under subsection 50 (1) (b) shall be to review and make recommendations regarding*
- a. *The number, boundaries and names of local government districts; and*
 - b. *The number, boundaries and names of the wards into which each district is divided.*
- 2.3 Schedule 4 of the above act sets out the appointment process for a LGB Commissioner, as well as the procedure for my Review that I must follow and the rules that I must adhere to. Full details of this legislation can be found at www.lgbc-ni.org.uk/links. I set out my approach to this legislation in Section 4 of this report.
- 2.4 The current names and boundaries of local government districts and wards in Northern Ireland are detailed in the Local Government (Boundaries) Order 2012. Following the 2012 Order, a number of District Councils made applications to the Department to amend the District name. These changes to the names of the districts took effect in 2016 full details of the legislation can be found at <https://www.lgbc-ni.org.uk/links>.
- 2.5 The current boundaries of districts and wards can be found on the Map Viewer at <https://apps.spatialni.gov.uk/LGBC/LGBCPublicConsultationApp/index.html>.
- 2.6 I have set out in detail my general approach to the Review and to the legislation in my Provisional Recommendations Report Chapter 4. This can be accessed at [LGBC - Provisional Recommendations 2021-2022 Review](#).

Chapter 3. Work to Date and key milestones

- 3.1 This chapter summarises the work done in advance of the publication of these Revised Recommendations for public consultation. A summary of key milestones is available at <https://www.lgbc-ni.org.uk/milestone-timeline>.
- 3.2 The data that informs the Review was provided by the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland on the Enumeration Date, the 4th January 2021.
- 3.3 I published a public notice on 3 February 2021 launching the LGBC website and announcing that the preparatory stage of my Review was complete. I invited proposals from councils, political parties, associations, organisations and individual members of the public in relation to the number, boundaries and names of the 11 districts: and the number, boundaries and names of the wards within the 11 districts.
- 3.4 In May 2021 I hosted a number of ‘Meet the Commissioner’ virtual information sessions with officers and members from the 11 councils. I used these virtual sessions to raise awareness among councils about the Review, to clarify the Review process and the timescales involved. A number of the questions raised during these sessions can be found at <https://www.lgbc-ni.org.uk/faqs>.
- 3.5 On 27 July 2021 I launched my Provisional Recommendations report for public consultation for a period of 8 weeks. I published a public notice in the local and regional press announcing the launch of the consultation and inviting responses from all interested parties. My proposals were presented in an online format with high quality digital maps for each district and ward provided by OSNI on Spatial NI. There was an online portal for responses, with more detailed responses submitted by e-mail. More detail on the consultation is included in the next section. The consultation closed on 21st September 2021.
- 3.6 On 1st August the Department for Communities appointed five Assistant Commissioners to assist me with my Review. From 28th September until 14th October a series of Public hearings

were held, one for each district. The hearings were chaired by the Assistant Commissioners, and were conducted in a hybrid format that allowed socially distanced in-person participation at the venues as well as participation via an online platform. The Assistant Commissioners have since submitted their reports to me on each of the districts, taking into consideration oral and written submissions. The Reports are published on the LGBC website at [Publications | Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for Northern Ireland](#). More detail on the consultation is found in Sections 4 and 5 of this report.

- 3.7 The second stage consultation on these Revised Recommendations will run for 6 weeks. The closing date for receipt of written representations is 1st March 2022.
- 3.8 I will give consideration to all representations received in formulating my final report and making my recommendations to the Department. The Department has directed me to submit my final report by 31 May 2022.

Chapter 4. Consultation on Provisional Recommendations.

- 4.1 I published my Provisional Recommendations for public consultation on 27 July 2021. I advertised the public consultation by publishing a public notice in the local and regional press, as well as via LGBC social media channels.
- 4.2 I announced the publication of my Provisional Recommendations and the opening of the 8 weeks consultation period by sending a letter of notification to Assessors to the Commissioner including the Chief Electoral Officer, the Director of Census (in place of the Registrar General), the Commissioner of Valuation and the Chief Survey Officer. Chief Executives of the 11 Councils were notified and asked to disseminate to their members, as were those government and non-governmental bodies on the Department for Communities Section 75 Consultee lists which includes all political parties in Northern Ireland and to all those who showed an early interest in my Review.
- 4.3 My Provisional Recommendations were presented in an online format with high quality digital maps for each district and ward provided by OSNI on Spatial NI. There was an online portal for responses, with an e-mail address provided for the submission of more detailed responses.
- 4.4 Libraries NI assisted in the consultation process by facilitating online access to the consultation across the network of local libraries in Northern Ireland. A number of District Councils also provided online access to the consultation for their citizens in council facilities, which meant that those who do not have internet access at home were able to access the report, maps and consultation. I am very grateful for Libraries NI and to the District Councils who were able to assist us in this, particularly given the challenging public health situation due to the Covid-19 pandemic over recent months.
- 4.5 The report and consultation documents were made available in alternative formats and in other languages on request. Following a request the team provided a translation of the report and consultation questions in Irish, which was also published on the LGBC website.

- 4.6 There were a total of 290 responses to the consultation. There were 8 responses received by e-mail and 282 on the online portal.
- 4.7 On the online portal, the vast majority of the responses referred only to the issue of monolingual/bilingual/trilingual ward and district names. There was strong support voiced for the use of bilingual Irish/English ward and district names, and strong support voiced against the use of any language other than English. There was limited support voiced for the use of Irish only names, and limited support for trilingual Irish/English/Ulster Scots names.
- 4.8 While more respondents on the online portal declared that they did not agree with proposals for each of the 11 districts than those who did support them, only a very small number gave reasons for this. Many of those who said they did not agree included comments setting out their support for/opposition to the use of bilingual English/Irish names. It is important to note that none of the district proposals included recommendations for the naming of wards or districts. The issue of signage is also out of scope for my Review. The majority of respondents did not answer the district specific questions.
- 4.9 I have set out my approach to the district specific issues raised in the consultation in Chapter 6 of this Report. Chapter 5 deals with my general approach to naming districts and wards.
- 4.10 Following the 8 week consultation period for written responses to my Recommendations, I convened a public hearing in each of the 11 districts. The public hearings were held in line with public health guidance. It was challenging for my team, supported by Morrow Communications, to locate suitable venues across the 11 Districts given the prevailing public health restrictions, I am very grateful to them for their efforts.
- 4.11 Given the public health situation and to allow increased participation for citizens, the events were held in a hybrid format, which allowed oral representations to be made in person and via an online platform.

- 4.12 Each hearing was chaired by an Assistant Commissioner. The Assistant Commissioners have all submitted reports to me on their Districts that took all oral and written representations into account. The reports are available at [Publications | Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for Northern Ireland](#).
- 4.13 I have considered the Assistant Commissioners' reports in respect of each District, which have been of considerable assistance to me in formulating these Revised Recommendations. I have departed from my Provisional Recommendations where an Assistant Commissioner's report has drawn to my attention something that I consider justifies such a revision. It is however important to note that by sections 50(1) and (3) of the 1972 Act, the functions of review and recommendation in the 2021/2022 Review are conferred on the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, and on no-one else. The recommendations that follow are therefore mine alone.

Chapter 5. Names of Districts and Wards.

Function of a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner

- 5.1 My primary function as Local Government Boundary Commissioner is the delineation of administrative boundaries which groups electors for the purpose of local elections and to seek to ensure that each vote has approximately equal weight. My work therefore is primarily calculating numbers in a spatial context using the latest detailed digital mapping.
- 5.2 Schedule 50 of the Local Government (NI) Act 1972, (as amended), also sets out my role in making recommendations for the names of local government districts and the names of wards. It is my view that my role in recommending names of the Districts and Wards is in large measure linked to my role in the delineation of boundaries.

My approach to this Review

- 5.3 I set out my approach to this Review in detail in my Provisional Recommendations report available at [LGBC- Provisional Recommendations 2021-2022 Review](#).
- 5.4 Following my established principle of minimum intervention where possible in this Review, and my approach that naming of districts and Wards is linked to my spatial consideration, it follows that if the space within proposed Districts and wards is not changing or shifting significantly, there would not seem to be a requirement to change the names from the names which were settled in the last Review and passed into legislation.

Legislative framework for changes to names of Districts and Wards

- 5.5 As set out above, Schedule 50 of the 1972 Act describes the function of a Local Government Boundaries commissioner, in relation to making recommendations for names of districts and wards.
- 5.6 It is important to note that the district names formed under a Local Government Boundary Review and subsequent legislation do not have to be adopted permanently by the council in

that District. It is open to any council to apply under Section 51 (1) of the Local Government Act to change its name. It is therefore not exclusively a matter for this Review process to settle the names of Districts.

5.7 In the period since the last Review, three councils have exercised the statutory right under Section 51 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to name the council differently from the district name conferred under the 2012 Order. I can therefore confirm the names of those councils have been legally changed pursuant to an application under Section (51) 1 and it follows that the District names are now officially:

- Ards and North Down (North Down and Ards in the 2012 Order);
- Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon (Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon in the 2012 Order); and
- Derry City and Strabane District (Derry and Strabane in the 2012 Order).

These three Districts are therefore referenced with their respective updated names in this report and associated official maps.

5.8 Ward names are not subject to any other method of potential name change other than in the periodic local government boundary reviews.

Bilingual/Trilingual names of Districts and Wards

5.9 There has been engagement in this Review by Conradh na Gaeilge, an organisation concerned with the promotion of the Irish language, and the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ). It is their submission that this Review, given that it has remit for place naming, should produce a map with names for all wards and Districts in Irish. These organisations provided me with a joint written submission in advance of the publication of my Provisional Recommendations. In addition, a representative of Conradh na Gaeilge attended the Public hearing in Belfast and provided oral evidence. Foras na Gaeilge provided a written submission to my Provisional Recommendations in support of the use of names in Irish across all local government districts. I received a number of responses to the consultation both for and against the use of Irish language and Ulster Scots in ward and District names. I received two written responses by e-mail setting out strong opposition to the use of any language other than English in ward and district names.

5.10 My view is that the starting point in considering this issue is to look to the commitments made in the New Decade New Approach (NDNA) Report in January 2020. Commitments in relation to the issue of language and culture in Northern Ireland are set out in Paragraphs 26 and 27 as follows:

26. *The First Minister and deputy First Minister, supported by Junior Ministers in The Executive Office, will sponsor and oversee a new framework both recognising and celebrating Northern Ireland's diversity of identities and culture, and accommodating cultural difference.*

27. *The framework will be underpinned by an affirmation of the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, while acknowledging and accommodating those within our community who define themselves as 'other' and those who form our ethnic and newcomer communities. It will comprise:*

a. An Office of Identity and Cultural Expression to promote cultural pluralism and respect for diversity, build social cohesion and reconciliation and to celebrate and support all aspects of Northern Ireland's rich cultural and linguistic heritage.

b. Legislation to create a Commissioner to recognise, support, protect and enhance the development of the Irish language in Northern Ireland and to provide official recognition of the status of the Irish Language in Northern Ireland. The legislation will also repeal the Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737.

c. Legislation to create a further such Commissioner to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots / Ulster British tradition and to provide official recognition of the status of the Ulster Scots language in Northern Ireland. The legislation will also place a legal duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate the use of Ulster Scots in the education system.

d. The main function of the Irish Language Commissioner will be to protect and enhance the development of the use of the Irish language by public authorities including by providing advice and guidance, and introducing, supporting and monitoring the use of best practice language standards.

e. The main function of the further such Commissioner will be to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots/ Ulster British tradition in Northern Ireland.

f. A central Translation Hub will also be established in the Department of Finance within three months of an agreement, in order to provide language translation services for the 9 Executive Departments, Arm's Length Bodies, Local Government and Public Bodies.

g. The Assembly's Standing Orders will also be amended to allow any person to conduct their business before the Assembly or an Assembly Committee through Irish or Ulster Scots. A simultaneous translation system will be made available in the Assembly to ensure that a person without Irish or Ulster Scots is not placed at a disadvantage.

h. This legislation - including establishing the Office and both Commissioners - will be established as new dedicated parts of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This is the legislation which implements the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and subsequent agreements and establishes the Assembly and Executive in law. The enactment of these new Parts of the Northern Ireland Act will reflect the importance of these issues to people and society in Northern Ireland.

i. The Office of Identity will provide funding streams and schemes, including publishing and broadcasting, small grants, events and tourism, exhibition and museum curation, built heritage, cultural education and tourism projects¹.

5.11 At the point of writing, these commitments have not been implemented by the NI Executive.

5.12 In the absence of the structures outlined above, my view is that an appropriate starting point for consideration of the Irish language issue, as a matter of law, is the recognition by the Court of Appeal in *Re MacGiolla Cathain's Application* [2010] NICA 24 at [2] – [3] that:

¹ [2020-01-08 a new decade a new approach.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

'... English remains the language of the vast majority of the population and it is the general language of public administration.

The way in which Irish should be recognised and valued in Northern Ireland is a matter of political debate. The Good Friday and St Andrew's Agreements pointed up the issue. How the question should be dealt with is a question of policy not law. The court cannot resolve the issue or contribute to the political debate. It can only determine the present appeal by reference to the correct legal principles applicable under the existing law'

It should be noted that this ruling predates the publication of the NDNA in 2020.

- 5.13 In my view it would be inappropriate, as well as a fundamental disservice to the important issue of language, if I were to make decisions on the use of Irish language across all administrative place names in the absence of any legislative framework on the use of minority languages in public administration.
- 5.14 As a general matter of policy affecting all districts and wards, it would be preferable for the question of the use of Irish and other minority languages to be addressed within the statutory framework committed to in *New Decade, New Approach* when put in place. However, in the absence of such a statutory framework, it may be appropriate for a particular district or ward to be named in a manner reflective of, for example, how that place is referred to locally, including in a minority language.
- 5.15 I note the information provided by Conradh na Gaeilge in relation to the Queen's University Belfast Place Names project. The Place Names project is a very interesting and valuable piece of work, which provides strong evidence on the Irish language origins of the majority of local place names. The work however is not as yet complete in that it does not include a list of agreed names for electoral wards in Northern Ireland. I therefore do not have evidence of fully authenticated names that could be said to be settled place names in Irish for all wards and districts across Northern Ireland.

Conclusions

- 5.16 It is therefore my view that there should be no change to my approach of naming districts and wards with the same names as settled in the 2012 Order subject to the following caveat: I wish to be careful not to conflate the issue of recognition of Irish Language (which is outside my remit) and the appropriateness of naming a district or ward by using a particular name which is connected to that place or space (which is within my remit).
- 5.17 I would make the distinction between the wider submission requesting that I adopt a naming convention across the whole map incorporating the Irish language, which is a request to develop a policy approach on the use and recognition of a language, and the different issue of very locally focused submissions on more appropriate ward names which may be more in keeping with the prevalent use of a language in that particular area.
- 5.18 Whilst it is my initial position not to interfere with the settled names of wards if nothing has changed in spatial terms since the last Review, if there is strong evidence to support the case that an existing ward name does not fully correspond to how local people refer to their particular place or space, then I think that case for a change of ward name could be made.
- 5.19 My assessment in each case will depend on the strength of the evidence in each particular locality. If it is the case that a ward name change which is based on the use of language and cultural identity in a particular area may have merit, then I have set out my views on this in the proposals for that that particular district.

Chapter 6. Revised Recommendations for the 11 Districts.

Summary position

District	Change from Provisional Recommendations
Antrim and Newtownabbey	Ward boundaries changes
Ards and North Down	Ward boundary changes, correction of district name
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	Correction of district name
Belfast	Ward boundary changes
Causeway Coast and Glens	Ward and minor district Boundary changes
Derry City and Strabane District	Correction of District name
Fermanagh and Omagh	Ward boundary changes
Lisburn and Castlereagh	Ward boundary changes
Mid and East Antrim	Ward and minor district boundary changes
Mid Ulster	No change
Newry Mourne and Down	No change

6.4 Belfast

- 6.4.1 I have provided considerably more detail in this chapter due to the volume and nature of the representations made to me in the consultation, and the analysis provided to me by the Assistant commissioner for Belfast. The Assistant Commissioner's report can be accessed at [Belfast City Assistant Commissioner's Report](#).

District boundary

6.4.2 *Galwally – District Line of Belfast with Lisburn and Castlereagh*

I note the submissions on this issue and the analysis of the Assistant Commissioner. I am in agreement with the rationale of the Assistant Commissioner on the importance of the fact that the boundary line at this point was mandated by a process of the Northern Ireland Assembly following the last Review in 2008/09. It is true to say that the boundary line at this area does not correspond to the recommendations made by my predecessor in the 2008/09 Review, however, it is the line which was passed into law after consideration and amendment by the legislature during the passage of the 2012 Act.

My approach in this Review is one of minimum intervention where possible. In the absence of a compelling reason, I am not persuaded to interfere with existing District boundary lines. I agree with the Assistant Commissioner that the submission made by Belfast City Council (BCC) does not constitute a compelling reason to interfere with the District boundary between the District of Belfast City and the District of Lisburn and Castlereagh. The submission from BCC can be accessed at [Belfast City Council - Submission to the LGBC.pdf \(lgbc-ni.org.uk\)](#) as can the letter from Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council [Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council - Submission to the LGBC.pdf \(lgbc-ni.org.uk\)](#).

I also note that there was another submission to alter the same District line at the area around Drumkeen to bring a small number of houses into Belfast from the District of Lisburn and Castlereagh. I agree with the Assistant Commissioner that there is no compelling reason to interfere with the District boundary line on this basis.

6.4.3 *Harbour*

I note the findings of the Assistant Commissioner and I am in agreement that the submission of Belfast City Council raises a compelling reason to realign the District

Boundary at Duncairn and Sydenham wards on the grounds of defacement. As stated by the Assistant Commissioner:

I believe that there is defacement to the existing district line between the District of Belfast City & Belfast Lough. Therefore it is reasonable to suggest that the district line should be amended to encompass existing and future development of the Harbour estate.

I have addressed this issue and the realignment of the District boundary at this point can be seen in the attached map.

Number and boundaries of wards

6.4.4 61 Ward Model

A submission by the SDLP relating to wards in South Belfast has been described as raising 'valid points' by the Assistant Commissioner. Some of the submission is noted as being out of scope as it references the clustering of wards under the District Electoral Areas process, which is a separate statutory process and not part of this Review. Other points raised by the SDLP made the case that my proposed ward configuration cuts across cohesive communities and is summarised by the Assistant Commissioner in his report as follows:

- ***Concern that the current proposals are based more on the required mathematical balancing than taking into account the actual experience and liveability of these wards on the ground and are therefore artificially separating communities and goes against the essence of democratic participation where established communities work with their recognised elected representatives for the ongoing enhancement of their area;***
- ***Suggest the addition of one additional ward within each of the Balmoral DEA & the Botanic DEA, to therefore have 12 wards as opposed to the current 10 within these areas (additional ward in each DEA) to take account of natural population growth within this area and to redesign the 12 wards in such a way as to accommodate, facilitate and recognise the natural growth of this part of the city rather than artificially cleaving it apart and splitting up communities;***
- ***Concern that the current proposals will artificially spilt existing communities (citing an example of the proposed changes adjacent to the Ravenhill Road along the Park Road, North Parade and South Parade with these being very distinct and unified communities and part of the Ormeau Road community and the problems that would occur if they were moved into the Ravenhill Ward);***

- **Concern that the current proposals will lead to a lack of community cohesion in areas where there is already an existing issue with low voter turnout, and**
- **Concern that the current proposals will negatively affect what are diverse communities and will create shells of communities, tilting the wards towards vast tracts of under populated areas where you have a transient population such as The Holylands or the wider university area or parts of the inner city.**

Under my approach I have followed a principle of minimum intervention where possible and so I have not changed District lines unless there is a compelling reason to do so. I have not increased or decreased the amount of existing wards because I was able to produce workable models which met the statutory criteria for all 11 Districts by using the same number of wards as currently exist.

6.4.5 However, there are other options open to me in terms of reconfiguring the changes required to distribute the number of electors in wards and indeed within districts. For example, I could reconfigure district lines to move electors in more populous areas such as Belfast into neighbouring districts that are less populous such as Lisburn and Castlereagh or Ards and North Down. I decided against this option under my principle of minimum disruption and instead configured the Belfast population within its existing district lines. A consequence of this is that there is more widespread change to the internal ward boundaries in order to equitably distribute the number of electors in Belfast across 60 wards.

6.4.6 Under the Rule in Paragraph 18, it is open to me to consider an increase or decrease of the number of wards in a District by a maximum of 5 wards if *'having regard to the matters mentioned in paragraph 17, the Commissioner considers it desirable.'* In considering the exercising of this discretion it is clear that I must only have regard to the Paragraph 17 factors, which are ***the size, population and physical diversity of the district and the desirability that there should be a proper representation of the rural and urban electorate within the district.***

- 6.4.7 At the outset of this process I was mindful of the Paragraph 17 factors that are of particular relevance to Belfast, namely the spatial size of Belfast and the fact that it is the most populous area of Northern Ireland. However, it is important to note that the legislation acknowledges and makes allowance for this by allocating 20 more wards to this District compared to all other Districts in Northern Ireland. When analysing the changes to electoral numbers within Belfast since the date of the last Review, the creation of more wards to deal with growth was considered. However, I decided to test whether the District could be configured by using 60 wards in order to demonstrate whether it was desirable to create more wards in Belfast. I was able to produce a 60 ward model which suggests that the 60 ward model still works for Belfast based on current numbers across the whole District.
- 6.4.8 The Assistant Commissioner notes the significant population growth in wards of Blackstaff, Central, Stranmillis and Windsor and on this basis he puts forward an alternative model of 61 wards to deal with the bulges in population which have occurred in these areas since the last Review. The SDLP submission argued for two additional wards. Whilst I did not choose a model of more than 60 wards for my Provisional Recommendations, I would not rule out using my discretion to increase or to decrease the number of wards as a method of configuring boundaries within a District and this submission provides a welcome opportunity to further test the issue in the context of this district.
- 6.4.9 In the previous Review, the Rule 17 factors were considered in reaching a decision to increase to 41 wards in the Districts of Newry Mourne and Down and Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon. However, it should be noted that these Districts have slightly different considerations than Belfast. These Districts encompass both urban and very rural areas. The same cannot be said of Belfast which is almost wholly urban. The analysis of the Assistant Commissioner in terms of the desirability of increasing the number of wards in Belfast has regard to the relevant matters in paragraph 17, namely size and population. Accordingly, in order to test the available evidence on the issue of population in Belfast and in particular in South Belfast, I have taken counsel from the Chief Statistical Officer for Northern Ireland who is a statutory advisor to me in this Review. Links to the data provided by the Northern Ireland Statistical and Research Agency (NISRA) can be found here [Population | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/population).

6.4.10 Data relating to population in different parts of the city is calculated on the four current Parliamentary Boundary constituencies (Belfast North, Belfast South, Belfast East and Belfast West). It should be noted that the submission under analysis refers to population in wards which largely fall within the Belfast South Parliamentary constituency. Numerically, Belfast South is the largest Parliamentary Constituency (PC) of the 4 constituencies in Belfast, with an estimated total of 115,900 people in mid-2020. Belfast South also has the largest population of people aged 16 and over, 96,700 people, as of mid-2020. I therefore agree that this is a particularly populous area of the city.

6.4.11 However, I also note that Belfast South PC has the highest levels of negative net migration since mid-2013, totaling 4,000 people leaving. The evidence also confirms that since the date of the last Review, Belfast South is **not the area of largest growth in the City**. Belfast East is the area of largest growth with Belfast South being second largest. Moreover, in general terms, whilst population may have increased in the city as a whole since 2009, **the population of Belfast is projected to stagnate over the next ten years**. The following statistics on this are notable:

- At the time of the last Review of Local Government Boundaries, the population of Belfast District in mid-2009 was estimated to be 331,800 people. By mid-2020, the population increased by 10,800 people (3.3 per cent) to reach 342,600;
- Population growth for Belfast District since mid-2009 **falls below the Northern Ireland population growth for the same period** (5.7 per cent);
- The population of Belfast District is projected to increase by 4,400 people (1.3 per cent) in the short term (mid-2018 to mid-2028), however less so in the long term (to mid-2043), 2,600 people (0.8 per cent);
- Northern Ireland over the same period is projected to grow by 3.7 per cent in the short term (mid-2018 to mid-2028) and 5.7 per cent in the long term (mid-2043);
- Age Analysis was also considered in terms of the likely impact of the impact of population statistics on electorate statistics (people coming on to the electoral register)

- Since mid-2009, the population of Belfast District has increased by the largest percentage in the middle to older ages;
- The population aged 40-64 has increased by 6,500 people (6.8 per cent) and the population aged 65+ has increased by 3,400 people (7.0 per cent). In comparison, the population aged 16-39 has decreased by 2,500 people (2.0 per cent) over the same period;
- This trend is projected to continue over the next 25 years. In the short term (mid-2018 to mid-2028) the population of Belfast is projected to increase by 2,900 people (2.9 per cent) for ages 40-64 and by 8,800 people (17.5 per cent) in the population aged 65+;
- In the long term, (mid-2043) the population aged 40-64 is projected to decrease slightly (0.3 per cent) while the population aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 40.3 per cent (20,200 people); and
- Belfast is also projected to experience significant decreases in the younger population, 0-15 and 16-39 over the next 25 years (mid-2043), by 12.2 per cent and 7.3 per cent, respectively.

Notably there is also a trend of population movement out of Belfast. Belfast District has experienced a **negative net migration since mid-2009**. Over the past decade, net migration has contributed to a loss of 10,600 people from Belfast District. The majority of this loss of people can be attributed to negative net internal migration, which totalled 8,100 people between mid-2009 to mid-2020. Essentially, this shows **a trend of people moving out of Belfast, mostly into other areas of Northern Ireland**.

6.4.12 These trends are projected to continue. In the short term, mid-2018 to mid-2028, Belfast District is projected to experience positive natural change of 10,000 people and in the long term (mid-2043) this is projected to increase to 19,400 people. In comparison, net migration is projected to remain negative. Over the period, mid-2018 to mid-2028, Belfast LGD is projected to lose 5,600 people due to net migration, increasing to 16,800 by mid-2043.

6.4.13 Aside from population I also looked at this issue in terms of any significant growth in the electorate figures since my enumeration date. I consulted with the Chief Electoral Officer of Northern Ireland, also a statutory advisor to me under this Review, who provided me with an informal update on trends emerging from the Electoral Office canvass. Having extensively researched and tested the issue of population and the impact of this in terms of electorate and balance of local government representation in Belfast, my conclusions are:

- ***It is difficult to conclude, on the grounds of population growth since the wards were last configured, that the area which is the subject of this proposal needs another ward or more representation at council level when compared to other areas of the City;***
- ***It is difficult to conclude that the District of Belfast requires additional local government wards over and above the current 60 ward model, when its projected population data is compared to other areas across Northern Ireland. The 60 ward model is workable on current numbers and is likely to continue to be workable when looking at the projections for population patterns over the next 10 years;***
- ***In balancing all of the evidence on the population of Belfast as a whole, and particularly the area of Belfast in question, I am not persuaded that another ward in the south of the city as submitted is justified. Indeed, I do not see any evidence which would persuade me that more than 60 wards would be required in this District;***
- ***I also note that the argument for more wards in Belfast was advanced by only one consultee. Belfast City Council actively engaged with the Review and did not make any representations that Belfast requires more than 60 wards; and***
- ***I therefore do not agree with the reasoning of the Assistant Commissioner that a 61 ward model for the District of Belfast is desirable having regard to all of the matters in Paragraph 17.***

I fully understand the views expressed about the challenges of drawing boundary lines around communities when the legislative focus is on achieving wards which are 'substantially the same' whilst drawing boundary lines which are 'readily identifiable'.

It is often the case that people find this process too focused on mathematical balancing and geographical features rather than paying attention to how people feel about disruption to cohesive communities and separating housing which was previously in the same ward.

It is difficult to preserve cohesion when the process is designed to redistribute the number of electors in an equal way. As a result, change to what people have become used to is unavoidable when updating electoral boundaries against patterns of population movement over a considerable period of time.

6.4.14 Where possible, I wish to ensure that readily identifiable boundaries are used and sometimes there may be many options of to choose from in terms of a readily identifiable boundary in an area. When comparing one boundary to another it is open to me to test the strength of numerous boundaries by listening to evidence such as that contained in the SDLP submission about the Ravenhill Road. I agree with the Assistant Commissioner's analysis on this particular issue:

the boundary between Ormeau and Ravenhill reverts back to the current ward boundary, as prior to this review, but this means Ravenhill still needs additional electors which is achieved by moving the boundary between Cregagh and Ravenhill, using the stream at the back of the houses at Onslow Parade as the real-world feature for the boundary to follow

As analysed by the Assistant Commissioner, the SDLP have made a relevant argument based on achieving a boundary that can be described as being more readily identifiable than the boundary I have proposed at this point. In addition, the use of this alternative boundary can also achieve the requirement of achieving ward units which contain a number of electors which is 'substantially the same' as set out in the reconfiguration set out in the report of the Assistant Commissioner. Indeed I also note a representation from the Alliance Party that states

Additionally, the proposed changes to the boundary between Ravenhill and Ormeau wards again removes a clear line of demarcation. The boundary remaining on the Ravenhill Road gives a clear boundary line between the DEAs of Botanic and Lisnasharragh.

Whilst this submission references the boundaries of District Electoral Areas, which is out of scope of my remit and is not a permissible consideration under my legislation, I note the phrase 'clear line of demarcation' which refers to the Ravenhill Road. This is broadly the same point that has been made by the SDLP submission about this area which tends to give this argument additional weight. I am therefore content to accept the analysis and proposal by the Assistant Commissioner to redraw the boundary line at Ormeau, Cregagh and Ravenhill wards as shown in the attached map.

6.4.15 There is a total of 230236 electors within the district which averages at 3837 electors per ward and my Revised Recommendations balance the electorate across the 60 wards. The revised ward and district boundaries changes that I have proposed can be viewed at [Belfast](#). The electorate per ward as at 4 January 2021 and the electorate per ward in my Proposed and Revised Recommendations are set out at Table 4 below.

Belfast Ward Names

6.4.16 As set out in Chapter 5 on the general issue of the naming of districts and wards under this process, it is my view that my role in recommending names of the Districts and Wards is in large measure linked to my role in the delineation of boundaries.

Descriptors of place for the naming of administrative units such as Districts and wards makes use of spatial reference points like compass points county names and also geographical features associated with a particular space such as a lough, river, mountain or main road. It is also true to say that many place descriptions have evolved from multiple languages and cultural influences.

6.4.17 In Chapter 5 I set out how I make the distinction between the wider submission on the use of the Irish language across the whole map, which is a request to develop a policy approach on the use and recognition of a language, and those submissions which are more local and nuanced in terms of how local people in specific areas refer to the name for their locality which, in some cases, may be linked to the use of a language and strong cultural heritage of a particular local area.

6.4.18 I also set out in Chapter 5 that I would not be inclined to interfere with naming of wards if nothing has changed in spatial terms since the ward was last settled with its legal name i.e. in the 2008/09 Review. However, if there is strong evidence to support the case that an existing ward name does not fully correspond to how the people living there identify and refer to their space or place, then I think that individual submissions could potentially be well argued for a ward name change, depending on the strength of the evidence in the particular locality. This includes names in a minority language.

6.4.19 I agree with the findings of the Assistant Commissioner about the potential merit in the submission for a ward name change in 7 particular Belfast wards to reflect how the local community refers to the areas in question. These wards are Ballymurphy, Beechmount, Cliftonville, New Lodge, Shaw's Road, Turf Lodge and Twinbrook. In these 7 wards there is evidence of prevalent use of the Irish language. In particular, a number of clear and tangible issues have been raised during the consultation including the fact that all 7 of these wards contain an Irish Medium School. This is a significant development since the last Review and the evidence of the growth of Irish Medium education in Northern Ireland over the last ten years is well documented. This is particularly true in parts of Belfast.

6.4.20 I also note the prevalence of the use of the Irish name for some of these wards based on how the community refers to the area on which the ward name is founded. I can see this in several of the consultation responses on the online portal that refer to Ballymurphy ward as Baile Uí Mhurchú. I further note that the Assistant Commissioner paid site visits to the areas identified and observed significant use of the Irish language in signage and other public communication in the locality and he received representation on the widespread use of Irish and the importance of the Irish language for the community in these areas. However, I also note that there is no evidence so far either from the consultation or from The Place Names Project that would support a well-used and understood name in the Irish language which could be nominated for the naming of all of these wards. There is no evidence available at all as to the Irish name used for the areas of Cliftonville ward Turf Lodge ward.

6.4.21 I can see that the Assistant Commissioner has focused on these 7 wards due to the location of Irish Medium Schools in each of these wards, but it is not clear that the community in each of these 7 wards do in fact share a well-known and understood Irish name for the area

which would be an appropriate ward name for me to propose. My conclusion is that some or all of these wards may be more appropriately named by use of the Irish name known and used by the local communities, but I am unable to make a definitive assessment at this stage as to what those names should be. However, I have received information from the Place Names Project at Queen's University which gives information on the Irish names on 5 of the 7 wards in question.

6.4.22 Accordingly, I am not minded to change any of these ward names in these revised proposals, but I would ask for further views on these 7 wards as to the appropriate name for each ward which I will duly consider when making my final recommendations after the secondary consultation has closed. The evidence received under the consultation, including the work done by the Place Names Project, suggests the following names may be well understood names for the areas:

Ballymurphy – Baile Uí Mhurchú;

Beechmount – Ard na bhFeá;

Cliftonville – No evidence of any other name used;

New Lodge – An Lóiste Úr;

Shaw's Road – Bóthar Seoighe;

Turf Lodge – No evidence of any other name used; and

Twinbrook – Cill Uiaghe.

6.4.23 I look forward to hearing more views on the potential names for these seven wards so that I may make a final evaluation.

Table 4. Belfast

Number of wards – 60	Total electorate - 230236	Average ward size - 3837	
Ward name	Current Electorate⁵	Proposed Electorate PROVISIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS	Proposed Electorate REVISED RECOMMENDATIONS (N.B. A figure has only been included where there is a change)
Andersonstown	3713	3713	
Ardoyne	3665	4018	
Ballygomartin	4168	4129	
Ballymacarrett	3819	3819	
Ballymurphy	3598	3598	
Ballysillan	3449	3651	
Beechmount	3605	3605	
Beersbridge	4076	3611	
Bellevue	3672	3672	
Belmont	3608	3608	
Belvoir	3681	3681	
Blackstaff	4398	4209	
Bloomfield	3919	3618	
Cavehill	3403	3513	
Central	5282	4214	
Chichester Park	3970	3860	
Cliftonville	3896	3896	
Clonard	3956	3828	
Collin Glen	4089	4089	
Connswater	3975	3975	

⁵ The manual geocoding process results in very small and statistically insignificant differences in the final electorate figures used for the Review, and the figures published by EONI on the enumeration date

Cregagh	3402	3577	3491
Duncairn	4584	4088	
Dunmurry	3878	3878	
Falls	3329	3457	
Falls Park	3707	3707	
Finaghy	3539	4217	
Forth River	3307	3479	
Fortwilliam	3393	3876	
Garnerville	3553	3553	
Gilnahirk	3740	3740	
Hillfoot	3630	3630	
Innisfayle	3932	3932	
Knock	3855	3649	
Ladybrook	3728	3927	
Lagmore	5070	3986	
Legoniel	3974	3772	
Malone	3754	4202	
Merok	3193	3513	
Musgrave	3705	4219	
New Lodge	3447	3460	
Orangefield	3568	3713	
Ormeau	4200	3911	4200
Poleglass	3969	4131	
Ravenhill	3399	3688	3485
Rosetta	4028	3853	
Sandown	3287	3794	
Shandon	4000	4000	
Shankill	4415	4086	
Shaw's Road	3984	3984	
Stewartstown	3644	3644	
Stormont	3791	3791	

Stranmillis	4391	4184	
Sydenham	3732	3732	
Turf Lodge	3521	3521	
Twinbrook	3475	4198	
Upper Malone	3707	4218	
Water Works	4307	3954	
Windsor	4865	4178	
Woodstock	3793	3793	
Woodvale	3498	3694	

Chapter 7. Next Steps

- 7.1 The public consultation on my Revised Recommendations is now open. The deadline for written representations is 1st March 2022.
- 7.2 Full details on how to access and respond to the consultation on my Provisional Recommendations is at <https://www.lgbc-ni.org.uk/consultation>.
- 7.3 Once I have considered the representations made in response to these proposals, I will submit my final report to the Department for Communities. The timeline for my Review can be accessed at www.lgbc-ni.org.uk/milestone-timeline.
- 7.4 Finally, I would encourage everyone to participate in the consultation process, either through the online portal at: <https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/consultation-on-lgbc-revised-recommendations> or by e-mail to: consultation@lgbc-ni.org.uk.

If you need any assistance accessing the proposals or need them in an alternative format please contact my team on info@lgbc-ni.org.uk. I look forward to hearing your views.