

4.35 In each of the three options for local government, decisions would be needed on the number of councillors. The issue would be to balance the need for adequate representation, taking into account the spatial dimension in rural areas, with the efficient working of councils. It is suggested that, under a seven-council model, each council should have up to 60 members.

Option 2 – The 11-Council Model

4.36 Figure 3 sets out three illustrations of 11-council areas, again based on the amalgamation of current district council areas. Population size would range from approximately 80,000 to 280,000, and councils would cover areas of between 115 and 3751 sq km. It is expected that 1:1 coterminosity could be achieved with many service delivery organisations. However, councils of this size could not achieve 1:1 coterminosity with health bodies, although they could match up on a 2:1 basis (see Chapter 5, paragraph 5.16). While 2:1 coterminosity has some benefits, it does not provide as strong an incentive for collaboration as 1:1 coterminosity, nor is it as effective in community planning since the health bodies would have to take account of the priorities of two separate councils.

4.37 Councils in this option would still be large organisations. They would be able to contribute as strong advocates within government and on overall service delivery. Assuming the same range of services was to transfer to local government, there would be some loss of efficiency in terms of economies of scale compared to the seven-council model and, as a consequence, extra costs would be incurred compared to the present arrangement for these services. In addition, there would be a greater overhead in supporting 11 rather than seven councils, headquarters and central administrations. As mentioned earlier, configurations of 11-council areas provide a less even spread of the underlying property wealth base than seven-council areas, however, they are better than 15-council areas.

4.38 The 11-council model would, therefore, benefit from economies of scale compared with the present 26 council structure but it would probably be less efficient in terms of service delivery than the seven-council option. On the other hand, it would arguably be better in terms of localism, and the illustrative boundaries in the configurations in Figure 3 do appear to offer some reflection of local communities. In this option it would be for

Option 11A
Council Boundaries



Option 11B
Council Boundaries



Option 11C
Council Boundaries



Figure 3

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councils themselves to decide whether it was necessary to provide a more local dimension, perhaps through the use of civic councils.

- 4.39** Under this option, the Belfast Council area would remain as in the seven-council option, and this would suggest retaining an upper limit of 60 councillors there. Given the smaller size of the councils outside Belfast, it is suggested that an upper limit of 40 councillors would be appropriate.

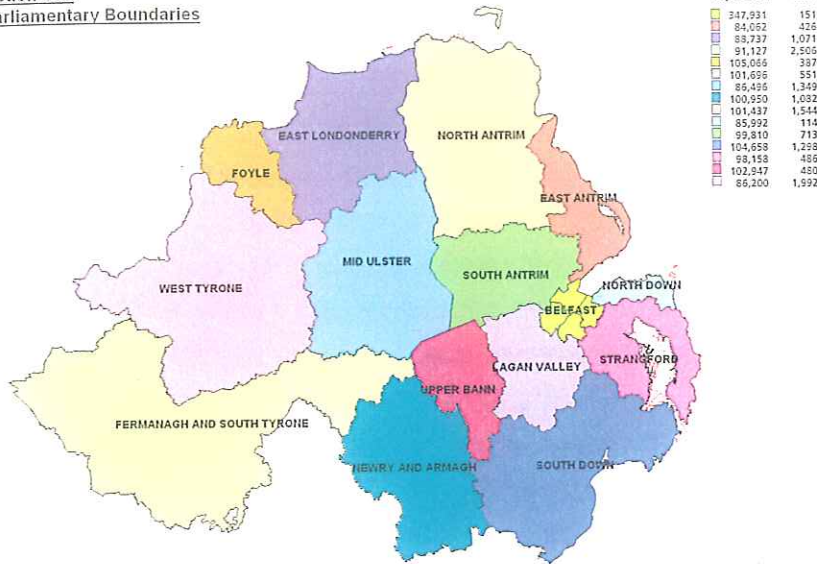
Option 3 – The 15-Council Model

- 4.40** Figure 4 sets out three illustrative maps of 15-council areas. The first of these, Map 15a, shows a model based on the existing parliamentary boundaries. Maps 15b and 15c give examples of configurations of 15 councils based on combinations of the present district councils.

The parliamentary boundary model

- 4.41** Under this model, there would be one council made up of the four Belfast parliamentary constituencies and 14 other councils, one for each of the other constituencies. Belfast would have a population of approximately 350,000 and the others would all be around 100,000. This model offers the possibility of earlier implementation since a Local Government Boundary Commissioner would start from predetermined boundaries and would only have to sub-divide these for electoral purposes and give names to the areas. The model achieves political coterminosity but, since parliamentary boundaries take no account of service delivery issues, coterminosity with other service providers would be lost. It is also relevant that previous Parliamentary Boundary Commissioners have noted the desirability of first establishing local government boundaries and using these as the building blocks for future parliamentary boundary reviews.
- 4.42** While political coterminosity would have the potential for better co-ordinated policy development with the Assembly and with Parliament, the loss of coterminosity for service delivery would run counter to one of the key messages from the consultation. This would make collaboration and community planning more difficult. Moreover, from a local government finance perspective, this option provides a more uneven spread of the underlying property wealth base than seven or 11 councils.

Option 15A
Parliamentary Boundaries



Option 15B
Council Boundaries



Option 15C
Council Boundaries



Figure 4

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15 Councils built on existing district council boundaries

- 4.43** The configurations shown in Map 15b and 15c, which are based on existing district councils, would have a population range of approximately 55,000 to 280,000 and would cover areas from 115 to 2471 sq km. Unlike the model based on parliamentary boundaries, it would be possible to achieve coterminosity with other service providers on a 2:1 or 3:1 basis. This is because a Local Government Boundary Commission could take account of service delivery issues specified by Government.
- 4.44** As noted, coterminosity at other than 1:1 is less effective and efficient, and this worsens as the number of organisations relating to one another increases. Hence, the potential of this model to achieve collaboration and effective community planning is less than for the 11-council model and even less so again when compared to the seven-council model.
- 4.45** Configurations of 15 councils would be less efficient for service delivery than the other options; however, this could be overcome to some extent by councils working together to provide services jointly to wider areas.
- 4.46** The 15-council model would have the benefit of greater scope to reflect local identity. On this scale, there may not be a requirement for more local arrangements. Also, unlike the parliamentary constituency option, this would provide a better opportunity for boundaries to be drawn to reflect natural communities. It would, however, be the least efficient and would be unlikely to achieve effective collaboration and community planning.
- 4.47** On the basis of the numbers of councillors suggested under the other options, up to 70 councillors for Belfast and 30 councillors per council elsewhere might be appropriate for the model based on parliamentary boundaries. For the 15-council model options based on existing district councils, the review team suggests an upper limit of 60 for Belfast and 30 for other councils.