

BELFAST CONSTITUENCIES

1. There were two main issues raised in the representations concerning the Belfast constituencies, namely:
 - whether there should be three or four constituencies, with the associated argument for the continuation of the existing Belfast South constituency; and
 - if there were three constituencies, where the boundary lines should be drawn.
2. A few representations proposed changes to the boundaries between the Belfast constituencies and adjacent constituencies to the north and east.

FOUR CONSTITUENCY BELFAST

3. In its Provisional Proposals Report, the Commission noted that the existing four Belfast constituencies amounted to 3.2 electoral quotas which meant that maintaining all four would require the import of approximately 22 wards from adjacent constituencies. The Commission tested a number of options which would have maintained a four seat Belfast but found that all of them required significant extensions of the Belfast perimeter into adjacent rural areas and settlements. The Commission therefore based its proposals on three Belfast constituencies with 12 wards transferring into the Strangford constituency.

Representations

4. The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) recommended that the existing four Belfast seats should be kept and used as the starting point for the review, stating that Belfast is the 'Metropolitan Centre' and economic driver for Northern Ireland and that these four seats should embrace the greater Belfast urban area. They argued that the provisional proposals cut many voters off from the city to which they belonged, transferring them to more rural and regional town constituencies.
5. The SDLP produced an alternative model in the form of a sample map of four Belfast constituencies. When we calculated the electorates for the constituencies on their sample map, we found that Belfast North was too small, even with the use of Rule 7.
6. Mr Alban Maginness, MLA considered that the Commission's proposals did not recognise the suburbanisation of Belfast, particularly around Newtownabbey. He proposed the transfer of Burnthill and Mallusk into Belfast North (reuniting Antrim Line DEA and maintaining the cohesion of Glengormley village) instead of the three Court DEA wards (Glencairn, Highfield and Shankill). His proposal relates solely to Belfast North.

7. A number of representations asked the Commission to reconsider its decision to recommend a three seat Belfast and to extend the boundaries into adjacent areas. Others sought to retain the constituency of Belfast South intact: most of these were from local organisations and community groups located in south Belfast. They cited existing physical boundaries such as the M1 and River Lagan; local identity; the breaking of community ties; the fragmentation of local networks and the possible adverse impact on inward investment.
8. Mrs Margaret Hoben and Ms Judith Hoben agreed with submissions supporting the retention of a four seat Belfast and proposed the use of Rule 7 to construct four seats at the lower end of the range by including the necessary electorate from surrounding wards. Strangford and North Down would become a new North Down constituency. Surplus electors would go to Belfast East and Belfast South. Belfast North would expand into South Antrim and Belfast West.

Consideration

9. The Commission recognised the merits of some of the arguments in favour of a four constituency Belfast including maintaining existing local ties within the Belfast Urban Area, delivering stronger representation for the capital city and acknowledging recent population movements, although not all of these are statutory considerations.
10. In response to the representations received, the Commission reviewed the potential for retaining the existing four Belfast seats, building on the proposal of the SDLP. The outer perimeter of the existing constituencies was expanded to comprise Belfast, Newtownabbey and Castlereagh LGDs in their entirety plus two wards from Carrickfergus LGD (Knockagh and Greenisland), six wards from North Down (stretching eastward from Loughview to Crawfordsburn), two wards from Lisburn (Drumbo and Seymour Hill) and Moneyreagh. In addition, ward transfers were required between the four existing Belfast constituencies to keep them within the 5% range e.g. by moving Twinbrook, Kilwee and Cregagh into Belfast South and Cliftonville, Water Works and New Lodge into Belfast West.
11. The Commission then considered the effect of these changes on other constituencies further from Belfast. In our best alternative model, Foyle remained the same as in the Provisional Proposals and Upper Bann and Lagan Valley required only small adjustments. However, there were significant ripple effects on all other constituencies: by way of illustration, South Down had to be divided between Strangford and Newry and Armagh in order to achieve the necessary reduction of one seat outside Belfast.
12. The four seat model which we devised would have addressed some of the problems of severing towns from parts of their hinterlands e.g. Newry, Coleraine, Ballymena and Dungannon. It would also have reunited most of Newtownards town with the Ards Peninsula. On the other hand, fewer of the new constituencies could be described as incremental adjustments to existing constituencies and our alternative boundaries would shave close to Omagh, Armagh, Ballycastle and Larne, cutting them off from part of their hinterland. Newtownards and the Mourmes would each be split between two constituencies. Traditional ties between Omagh and West Tyrone would be broken. Cookstown,

Dungannon and Armagh would be joined in a single constituency. The perimeter of the four Belfast constituencies would extend as far as Crawfordsburn, Greenisland and Moneyreagh.

13. In previous boundary reviews, a four seat Belfast was accommodated by the gradual inclusion of suburban development, coupled with the fact that there was no statutory requirement as to the range of electorate around the quota. In the Fifth Review, the boundaries of the four constituencies were extended in a northerly, southerly and easterly direction while largely remaining within the continuous built up area of the conurbation.
14. In the current Review, the Commission considered that it should not recommend the extension of the boundaries further into adjacent suburban and rural areas, as it would have to do in order to create four viable Belfast constituencies.

Conclusion

15. The Commission has concluded that to extend the perimeter of the Belfast constituencies as far as would be necessary to accommodate four constituencies under the new rules would stretch it far beyond the continuous built-up area, and would have undesirable ripple effects. It would entail breaking local ties between a number of towns outside Belfast and their hinterlands and would require greater changes in existing constituency boundaries. The Commission accordingly confirms its provisional proposal that there should be three Belfast constituencies.

THREE CONSTITUENCY BELFAST

The Provisional Proposals

16. In its Provisional Proposals Report, the Commission recommended that there should be three constituencies in Belfast with the consequence that 12 Belfast wards should be moved into adjacent constituencies. A number of respondents either supported or were silent on the Commission's rationale for a three constituency Belfast.

Representations

17. In their first response to the consultation, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) did not challenge the Commission's decision to adopt a three seat Belfast. They did however describe as 'very bad' the boundaries proposed for Belfast South East. Their second response stated that a significant flaw in a four seat solution for Belfast is that "the city of Lisburn is divided to simply make up the numbers".
18. Sinn Féin (South and East Belfast) did not challenge the Commission's decision to adopt a three seat Belfast but proposed amendments to the boundary between Belfast South West and Belfast South East.
19. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) submission concluded that they were not proposing any changes

to the Commission's provisional proposals for 11 of the constituencies, including Belfast North, Belfast South East and Belfast South West.

20. The Alliance Party argued that to justify four constituencies would require more than the whole of Castlereagh and Newtownabbey as well as the rural area between Lisburn and Carryduff to be added to the city. They said that a concept of 'Belfast' which included Saintfield as well as extending three miles north of Ballyclare would be meaningless, as well as causing unacceptable knock-on effects on adjacent constituencies.
21. In his second response, Dr Nicholas Whyte concluded that there was no plausible alternative to the abolition of Belfast South because otherwise the constituency would stretch eastward almost to Comber, southward almost to Saintfield, and southwest to Lisburn. He argued that it is better to accept that there are no longer sufficient numbers to preserve the constituency.
22. In his second submission, Mr David McWhinney stated that the proposal to extend the boundaries of the existing four seats outward simply to make up the required numbers does not recognise the demographic reality that Belfast's population has been declining over several decades in comparison to growth elsewhere and that the disruption to local ties within the city is nothing to that produced by the knock-on effects.
23. Mr Peter Smyth pointed out that it is not practical to keep expanding the existing seats into surrounding rural areas with little or no connection with the city. Other contributors submitted detailed proposals based on a three seat Belfast, including Messrs Michael Moriarty and John McGurk.

Alternative three-constituency Belfast proposals

24. Mr John Auld said that the Commission had made the right decision about the number of Belfast constituencies but had chosen the wrong configuration. He proposed an alternative three-constituency Belfast: Belfast North (taking in six additional Newtownabbey wards); Belfast West (with the addition of the Belfast North wards of Crumlin and Woodvale and the Belfast South wards of Finaghy and Musgrave); and Belfast South & East (comprising 22 Belfast local government wards plus Cregagh, Downshire, Wynchurch and Lisnasharragh). His proposals required the use of Rule 7 for five seats and had significant ripple effects across the Antrim and western constituencies.
25. Mr Paul Hoben argued that if there were to be three Belfast constituencies then Belfast East, with the smallest electorate, should have been subsumed into the other three: it would be possible to combine elements of Belfast East with Belfast North as easy access between them is provided by three bridges across the Lagan.
26. Although her first preference was for a four-seat Belfast, Mrs Margaret Hoben also outlined an alternative three-seat model. This involved augmenting Belfast North with three wards from Belfast West; augmenting Belfast South with six wards from Belfast East and joining the remaining Belfast East and Belfast West wards to form a new Mid Belfast constituency straddling the River Lagan and stretching from Upper Springfield in the west to Orangefield in the east.

Conclusion

27. The Commission carefully considered the alternative proposals for a three seat Belfast configuration but concluded that its provisional proposals better reflect existing local ties and geographical considerations.

BOUNDARY OF BELFAST SOUTH WEST AND BELFAST SOUTH EAST

28. The Commission's provisional proposals locate the Shaftesbury ward in Belfast South West (Belfast SW) and the Botanic and Stranmillis wards in Belfast South East (Belfast SE). A variety of views were expressed in the submissions received regarding the boundary between Belfast SW and Belfast SE, ranging from retention of the existing Belfast South constituency to satisfaction with the provisional proposals. However, there was one consistent theme, namely that there are local ties between the Lower Ormeau Road and the Markets area which would be broken by the proposed change in constituency boundaries.

Representations

29. The DUP proposed that the River Lagan, as an identifiable natural feature, should be the boundary between the Belfast SW and Belfast SE constituencies. This would mean the transfer of both Botanic and Stranmillis wards from Belfast SE to Belfast SW to join Shaftesbury, on the basis of shared services and transport links. While Belfast SW could absorb the two additional wards, the electorate of Belfast SE would then fall below the 5% range and outside the discretion of Rule 7. To compensate, the DUP proposed the transfer of Minnowburn, Beechill and Upper Braniel from Strangford to Belfast SE.
30. Sinn Féin (South and East Belfast) proposed that Shaftesbury ward should transfer from Belfast SW to Belfast SE so as to be in the same constituency as Botanic ward. They argued that the exclusion of the Shaftesbury ward from Belfast SE would fragment a number of community structures which join Lower Ormeau (Botanic) with the Markets and Donegall Pass areas (Shaftesbury). An Droichead made a similar case on the grounds of community cohesion and historic, social and cultural ties. As evidence of local ties between the Botanic and Shaftesbury wards, Sinn Féin listed a number of community, sporting and church structures.
31. Sinn Féin also argued that historically and socially the Markets area is closely identified with the Short Strand and Lower Ormeau and that it would make political, sporting, cultural and community sense for the three communities to be within the same constituency. To compensate, they proposed the reciprocal transfer of Stranmillis ward into Belfast SW on the basis that Stranmillis is closer "both in geography and community make up to the Balmoral wards than Shaftesbury".
32. Dr Nicholas Whyte and Messrs Michael Moriarty, David McWhinney and Peter Smyth for various

reasons proposed exchanging the Stranmillis and Shaftesbury wards. Mr McWhinney argued that the addition of Shaftesbury instead of Stranmillis to Belfast SE “allows a natural continuity along the full length of the Ormeau Road into the city centre” and that Stranmillis is demographically closer to the Balmoral DEA wards. Mr Moriarty stated that Botanic and Shaftesbury are both downtown wards and that Stranmillis is geographically closer to Belfast SW and socio economically closer to the Balmoral DEA wards. Mr Smyth argued that Stranmillis is separated from the rest of Laganbank DEA by the River Lagan and the Botanic gardens and therefore seems a more logical choice than Shaftesbury for location in Belfast SW.

33. The same four respondents also argued that the Upper Braniel ward should be in Belfast SE rather than Strangford on grounds of local ties as it is a largely urban ward closely associated with Lower Braniel and east Belfast. Mr Moriarty, in addition, noted that it is the only ward in Castlereagh Central DEA that is not in Belfast SE. This proposal was also made by the DUP. Taken together, these two proposals would bring both constituencies within the acceptable range.
34. Mr John McGurk also proposed the transfer of Shaftesbury into Belfast SE on local ties grounds in order to keep the inner city communities of Lower Ormeau (Botanic), Short Strand (Ballymacarrett) and the Markets and Donegall Pass (Shaftesbury) together. However, he made up the deficit in Belfast SW not by transferring Stranmillis but by importing the five wards of the Court DEA from Belfast North. To bring Belfast SW within the statutory range, he proposed the transfer of Derryaghy North and Dunmurry from Belfast SW to Lagan Valley. He brought Belfast North within the 5% range by importing six Newtownabbey wards from South Antrim. Mr McGurk’s proposals for the boundary between Belfast SW and Belfast SE are part of a significant redrawing of the constituencies delineated in the Provisional Proposals with only one (North Down) remaining unchanged.
35. A number of community groups and local organisations in Belfast South drew attention to the continuum of the Ormeau Road and stressed the importance of local identity in inner city communities such as Donegall Pass, Sandy Row, the Markets and the Village. Sandy Row Community Forum stressed that they had worked hard to build community relations with the Markets, Lower Ormeau, Donegall Pass and the Village, and with the South Belfast Partnership Board to establish a relationship with the broader constituency. However, as their arguments were deployed in support of maintaining a four constituency Belfast, none of the groups suggested revisions to the proposed Belfast SW/Belfast SE boundary.

Consideration

36. The representations received outline a case, based on local ties, for keeping the Shaftesbury and Botanic wards together in the same constituency. However, the two wards are not internally homogeneous but diverse. They both have local ties with other adjacent wards. We are aware that there are connections between the Blackstaff and Shaftesbury wards which would be broken by the suggested revision.
37. Locating the two wards in Belfast SE, combined with the suggested transfer of Upper Braniel to Belfast SE, would keep all the Belfast constituencies within the 5% range. However, the assertion of

local ties between the Shaftesbury ward and the Short Strand area is inconclusive. The latter falls into Ballymacarrett ward which also includes the Lower Newtownards Road.

38. Locating both wards in Belfast SW, along with Stranmillis, would preserve local ties between the Lower Ormeau and Markets areas while acknowledging the River Lagan as a geographical boundary between the Shaftesbury and Ballymacarrett wards. However, to use the river as the boundary between Belfast SW and Belfast SE would have widespread ripple effects on other constituencies to the south. As modelled by the Commission, these would require the transfer of Crossgar from South Down to Strangford and the application of Rule 7 to both constituencies.
39. Representations supporting the location of Stranmillis in Belfast SW along with Malone and Windsor were largely based on the similarity of socio-economic status of their electorates. This is not a consideration that the Commission can take into account.
40. The geography of Belfast is such, with the penetration of the Lough between north and east, that the most satisfactory way in which three constituencies can be delineated is by dividing the current constituency of Belfast South. The requirements of the 5% rule mean that the division between Belfast South West and Belfast South East lies in the area of Shaftesbury, Botanic, Stranmillis, Windsor and Malone wards.

Conclusion

41. In the built-up areas of cities, there are inevitably difficulties in delineating boundaries without breaking some existing local ties. The Commission has concluded on balance that the arguments for revising its provisional proposals are not sufficiently strong to merit a revision in this instance.

BOUNDARY OF BELFAST SOUTH EAST AND STRANGFORD

Representations

42. The DUP expressed concern about the boundary between Belfast SE and Strangford. Their proposals for Belfast SW left Belfast SE needing electorate which they proposed to remedy by importing Minnowburn, Beechill and Upper Braniel wards from Strangford, thereby uniting Castlereagh West and Castlereagh Central DEAs. They said that these wards are not oriented in any meaningful way with the major population centres in Strangford.
43. Messrs David McWhinney, Michael Moriarty and Peter Smyth proposed the transfer of Upper Braniel from Strangford to Belfast SE on the grounds that it was historically and geographically part of east Belfast and had closer links with wards such as Lower Braniel, Hillfoot, Gilnahirk and Tullycarnet than with Newtownards and Comber. Dr Nicholas Whyte agreed with their arguments but added that the urban and rural parts of the Upper Braniel ward might be split between Belfast SE and Strangford.
44. Dr Jolyon Agar objected to the incorporation of Dundonald into rural Strangford after being

removed from it at the Fifth Review, on the grounds that it had more in common with the Belfast SE wards of Stormont and Ballyhackamore than with Derryboy and Killyleagh.

Conclusion

45. The Commission considered that the arguments in favour of the transfer of Upper Braniel from Strangford to Belfast South East had merit on local ties grounds and minimal numerical impact. The Commission has decided to recommend the transfer of this ward (see map at Appendix B).
46. The Commission is not convinced by the case for transferring Minnowburn and Beechill from Strangford. This is because the ripple effects on the southeast constituencies are extensive, involving the transfer of Crossgar from South Down to Strangford and requiring the application of Rule 7 for both.
47. The Commission's decision to recommend a three seat Belfast means that some suburban areas to the east of the city, including Dundonald, will have to be transferred to Strangford.

BOUNDARY OF BELFAST NORTH AND SOUTH ANTRIM

Representations

48. Mr Timothy Davis expressed concern about the continuing carve-up of Newtownabbey between constituencies, and the Commission received a number of representations proposing the transfer of varying numbers of Newtownabbey wards into Belfast.
49. The DUP proposed the import of Burnthill from South Antrim to Belfast North to unite six of the seven wards of Antrim Line DEA on the grounds that they share the same characteristics, service linkages and orientation to Newtownabbey and Glengormley as the other five wards and that the transfer improves the constituency boundary without numerical consequences. They ruled out the transfer of the remaining Antrim Line ward (Mallusk) on size grounds.
50. SDLP (North Belfast) sought to reunite the Antrim Line DEA and maintain the cohesion of Glengormley village by importing Mallusk and Burnthill into Belfast North instead of the three Court DEA wards (Glencairn, Highfield and Shankill). The change would be numerically minimal for Belfast North but would leave South Antrim and Belfast South West outside the scope of Rule 7.
51. Croi Éanna urged the Commission to transfer Mallusk from South Antrim into Belfast North on grounds of geography, historic connections with Ballybought, demography and links to Belfast amenities. However this would reduce South Antrim below the scope of Rule 7.
52. Mr John Auld proposed extending Belfast North to incorporate six additional Newtownabbey wards (Burnthill, Carnmoney, Mossley, Ballyduff, Hawthorne and Mallusk) and ceding Crumlin and Woodvale to Belfast West. His proposals formed part of a considerable reconfiguration of the

proposed constituencies with significant ripple effects across the Antrim and western constituencies and requiring the use of Rule 7 for five seats.

53. Mr John McGurk's proposals for Belfast also included importing Mallusk, Burnthill, Ballyduff, Mossley, Hawthorne and Carnmoney from South Antrim into Belfast North so that the boundary between them would no longer interfere with local ties by winding through the streets of Glengormley. The transfer would be offset by moving the five wards of the Court DEA from Belfast North into Belfast SW.
54. Mr Michael Moriarty proposed the transfer of Jordanstown, Monkstown and Rostulla from South Antrim to Belfast North balanced by the reciprocal transfer of Ballyhenry, Collinbridge, Glebe, Glengormley and Hightown. This proposal will be addressed in the context of his proposed reconfiguration of the Antrim constituencies (see Chapter 6).
55. Dr Nicholas Whyte did not support any of the alternative proposals for the South Antrim/Belfast North boundary as "none of them can avoid the problem of boundaries looping through the streets of Newtownabbey". He preferred the Commission's provisional proposals in terms of keeping decent internal communication in north Belfast.

Conclusion

56. The Commission has decided against significant changes to the Belfast North/South Antrim boundary such as those proposed by Messrs Auld and McGurk in view of the knock-on effects on other constituencies, both adjacent and further afield, and the widespread need to apply Rule 7.
57. The Commission has decided not to transfer Mallusk or Burnthill to Belfast North on the grounds that this would not be compatible with the Commission's proposed reconfiguration of South Antrim and (new) East Antrim (see Chapter 6).