REPORT OF ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER
EILEEN BRADY B.L.
ON THE
DISTRICT ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER’S
PROVISIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR
BELFAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISTRICT

OCTOBER 2013
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1. Introduction

The new Northern Ireland Local Government Districts

1.1 Following a review of local government wards and districts in 2008/9, the Local Government (Boundaries) Order (NI) 2012 was made on 30 November 2012 establishing the boundaries and names of 11 new local government districts for Northern Ireland and their constituent wards. The new districts, as set out in the 2012 Order, are:-

- Antrim and Newtownabbey
- Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon
- Belfast
- Causeway Coast and Glens
- Derry and Strabane
- Fermanagh and Omagh
- Lisburn and Castlereagh
- Mid and East Antrim
- Mid Ulster
- Newry, Mourne and Down
- North Down and Ards

1.2 The Belfast local government district comprises 60 wards; Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon district and Newry, Mourne and Down district both contain 41 wards; and the remaining 8 districts have 40 wards each.

Review of District Electoral Areas

1.3 The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt. Hon. Theresa Villiers MP, appointed Richard Mackenzie, CB, as District Electoral Areas Commissioner for Northern Ireland with effect from 21 January 2013. His task was to make recommendations for the grouping together of the wards in each of the eleven new local government districts into District Electoral Areas (“DEAs”) for the purpose of local government elections.
Legislation

1.4 The legislative provisions concerning the appointment and function of the Commissioner, the procedures to be followed in reviewing DEAs and the rules in accordance with which recommendations are to be made are contained in the District Electoral Areas Commissioner (Northern Ireland) Order 1984 (“1984 Order”), as amended by the District Electoral Areas Commissioner (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Orders of 2007 and 2009 and the District Electoral Areas Commissioner (Northern Ireland) Order 2012.

1.5 Schedule 3 to the 1984 Order, as amended, prescribes four rules in accordance with which recommendations of the Commissioner are to be made. These are:-

1. No ward shall be included partly in one electoral area and partly in another.
2. Each electoral area shall consist of not less than five, and not more than seven, wards.
3. Each ward in an electoral area shall have at least one boundary in common with another ward in that area, except where the ward consists of an island.
4. A name shall be given to each electoral area.

Other factors

1.6 In publishing his Provisional Recommendations in May 2013, the Commissioner noted that the 1984 Order does not provide any guidance as to the factors which could or should be taken into account in formulating proposals for DEAs or whether the number of wards to be included in any electoral area should be 5, 6 or 7. In the absence of such guidance, and for the reasons set out at paragraphs 3.2 to 3.8 of the Provisional Recommendations Report, he considered it reasonable to establish a range of factors which would inform his approach to the grouping of wards as DEAs. The approach which he adopted was, where possible, to have regard to the following:
• the use of physical features such as loughs, estuaries, rivers, hill ranges, and major roads as DEA boundaries;

• the creation of distinct urban and rural DEAs;

• the inclusion of complete settlements within a DEA;

• the creation of geographically compact DEAs;

• the creation of DEAs where the ratio of electorate to each councillor is not more than 10% from the overall ratio for the district as a whole.

1.7 The Commissioner also felt that it would be unreasonable to ignore the existing DEA framework altogether, since it has been in place for many years. However, he recognised that there has been a substantial change in the ward architecture of Northern Ireland as a result of the Local Government (Boundaries) Order (NI) 2012.

Naming of DEAs

1.8 The approach adopted by the Commissioner to the naming of his proposed DEAs is set out at paragraph 3.9 of the Provisional Recommendations Report. He has often used existing DEA names with which people are familiar. Where the difference between the old and new DEAs is significant, he has proposed a new name which has a resonance with the locality concerned, by reference to place names or geographical features.

Public consultation

1.9 The procedure to be followed in a review of District Electoral Areas (DEAs) is set out in Schedule 2 to the 1984 Order, as amended, and provides among other things for:

• an eight week public consultation period for the submission of written representations with respect to the Commissioner’s provisional recommendations for electoral areas in a district; and
the holding of a public inquiry where representations are received objecting to the Commissioner’s provisional recommendations for a district. If a district council or not less than 100 electors make an objection, an inquiry must be held, otherwise inquiries may be held at the Commissioner’s discretion.

Provisional Recommendations

1.10 The Commissioner’s provisional recommendations for the grouping of wards into District Electoral Areas, together with his recommendations for their names, were published on 2 May 2013 for an eight week public consultation period ending on 27 June 2013. A total of 30 representations were received in relation to his proposals. The Commissioner’s provisional recommendations, including maps, and the representations received may be viewed on his website.

Public Inquiries

1.11 On the basis of the representations received, the Commissioner decided that nine public inquiries should be held to consider objections to his proposals. No representations were received in relation to the Causeway Coast and Glens district and the only objections to the proposals for Derry and Strabane district were to the proposed name of the Rosemount DEA. No public inquiries were deemed necessary in those districts. Details of the nine public inquiries were published in advance in a number of daily and provincial newspapers as well as on the Commissioner’s website.

Appointment of Assistant District Electoral Commissioners

1.12 The legislation provides that the Commissioner may ask the Secretary of State to appoint one or more Assistant Commissioners to inquire into, and report on, such matters as the Commissioner thinks fit. Accordingly, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt. Hon. Theresa Villiers MP, appointed me as Assistant Commissioner on 2 July 2013.
1.13 I was directed by the Commissioner to preside over the public inquiry into objections to his provisional recommendations for the DEAs for the Belfast District. The inquiry was held in the Hilton Hotel, Belfast on 17th September 2013. At the inquiry, 17 people made oral representations, 6 of whom had already submitted views in writing during the consultation period. A list of the written representations received is at Appendix A of this report. Details of those who made oral submissions are at Appendix B. A transcript of the inquiry can be viewed on the Commissioner’s website.

Site visits

1.14 I have been to view those areas of greatest concern within Belfast local government district.

Content of the report

1.15 This report considers the written and oral representations received in relation to the proposed groupings of wards into DEAs for the Belfast district and on the recommended names for the DEAs. It details support for, objections to and counterproposals made in relation to the Commissioner’s provisional recommendations and presents my conclusions and recommendations.

1.16 I have considered all of the representations made (both written and oral) in respect of the Belfast district. I have taken them all into account in arriving at my conclusions and making my recommendations in this report. I have taken account of all of the rules set out in Schedule 3 of the 1984 Order and the full range of factors identified by the Commissioner. My recommendations are based on my judgement of the balance of these factors in light of the need to compose DEAs in accordance with the statutory requirements.
2. DEA Ward Groupings

WEST BELFAST

2.1 The Democratic Unionist Party made a written submission concerning Court DEA. The main thrust of the issue was, in their view, that on considering the deep and clearly strong local ties of the Court wards of Forth River, Ballygomartin, Woodvale and Shankill, it would be a better option to add just one additional and more suitable ward, Falls, in order to create a five ward grouping. The result would involve the removal of the Clonard ward from Court DEA.

2.2 The case for the addition of Falls ward only is based on

- there being more access points through the peace line between the Shankill and the Falls wards than the Woodvale and Clonard;
- both Shankill and Falls wards take in small parts of the city centre;
- there is a stronger identifiable boundary between Falls ward and Clonard and Beechmount wards than the proposed line between Falls and Clonard wards and Beechmount ward. The Royal Victoria Hospital site and a main arterial route make up almost all of the boundary between the Falls, Clonard and Beechmount wards whereas the Provisional Recommendations show the division between Clonard and Beechmount wards being made up largely of a collection of side streets;
- under this proposal the boundary line would shift back to the peace line and a main arterial route (Springfield Road) for a significant section;
- the peace lines were adopted in the earlier proposals for ward boundaries because of their easy identification as a boundary and arterial routes are clearly identifiable and often used boundary.

2.3 The proposal that Clonard should move to Blackmountain from Court DEA would involve moving Collin Glen ward into Collin DEA. This would involve the creation of two seven ward DEA’s of Blackmountain and Collin.
2.4 The DUP contend that it makes more sense for the Collin Glen ward to be included in the Collin DEA, as the DEA takes its name from Collin Glen’s main geographical feature. The provisional recommendations divide the Colin Glen Forest Park between two DEAs. The inclusion of Colin Glen into Collin DEA would bring the forest park entirely within the one DEA, a further example of local linkage between this ward and the DEA.

2.5 As a result of this proposal the DUP argue that there will be a strong boundary of ridge line road ways and limits of development and then a short section of streets. This would be more robust and certainly equal to the boundary line in the provisional recommendations.

2.6 The SDLP made a written submission accompanied by a petition. The petition wording highlighted the petitioners unhappiness at the grouping of Beechmount ward into Blackmountain DEA and concern that there is no recognition of the common identity the people of the Lower Falls feel. The movement of Beechmount ward into the Court DEA would better reflect their unique identity.

2.7 In addition, the submission proposed that the movement of Beechmount ward from Court DEA (previously Lower Falls DEA) should not occur due to Beechmount feeling a stronger connection to the areas of Falls and Clonard. It was submitted that these wards form a very distinct community as opposed to that of the proposed new Blackmountain DEA. In addition, it was contended this separation will limit voter participation if a distinct community is not catered for. Beechmount ward is considered more closely linked with Falls ward (as part of the lower Falls) as a natural geographical divide exists in the form of the Blackwater River and industrial grounds.

2.8 At the public inquiry SDLP Councillor Colin Keenan, made a visual and oral presentation on behalf of the petitioners referred to at paragraph 2.6.

2.9 The presentation reiterated the point that Beechmount ward should not be part of Blackmountain DEA but should be placed in Court DEA. This would result in a seven ward Court DEA and a six ward Blackmountain DEA.
2.10 In addition, the distinct community identity of Beechmount with Clonard and Falls wards was raised. Long established ecclesiastical and parish links were illustrated.

2.11 The Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) as a common source of employment was used to show a common distinct identity between Falls, Clonard and Beechmount ward residents.

2.12 It was submitted that, when canvassing signatures from Beechmount residents, it was apparent petitioners did not want to be separated from the Clonard and Falls wards; rather there was support for the common identity these wards shared.

2.13 Emphasis was made concerning the issue of Cluain Mor estate not being considered as part of the Beechmount ward, along with the issue of Beechmount Gardens being included in the Clonard DEA. The movement of Beechmount into Court DEA would address such separations. Furthermore, houses at the top of Broadway Road near the RVH are split from Beechmount with which they identify themselves, and transfer of Beechmount into Court DEA would address this.

2.14 The SDLP representation further argued that:

- The electoral wards of Falls, Beechmount and Clonard enjoy a spatial barrier, that is devoid of residential housing, which distinctly separates them from other electoral wards. It was submitted that the DUP submission inadvertently supported this view with comments like “The Royal Victoria Hospital Site and a main arterial route makes up almost all of the boundary between the Falls, Clonard and Beechmount wards while under the DEA provision the boundary between Clonard and Beechmount would be made up mainly of side streets”.

- Sinn Fein is motivated to support the provisional recommendations for electoral advantage.

- Beechmount Residents Association is split on the issue of supporting the move into the Blackmountain DEA as evidenced by members supporting the petition for the transfer of Beechmount to Court DEA.
The Blackie Centre deals with children mainly from Beechmount and Clonard. Further community links were illustrated, people from Cluain Mor estate which is located in Beechmount ward having more daily ties with Clonard as they frequent shops on the Springfield Road. A high degree of interaction in this locality was referred to through residents using shops on the Falls Road, and not just Beechmount residents using them.

A strong distinct community identity exists between the people of Falls, Beechmount and Clonard.

Whilst it is arguable that the St James’s area and the Rock Streets are closely linked to Whiterock, in terms of wards, Falls, Clonard and Beechmount are a clearly identifiable and distinct community. The proposal to move Beechmount to Court DEA will preserve and strengthen the community and this is supported by a petition of two hundred supporters.

At the inquiry, the Sinn Fein MLA for West Belfast Fra McCann made submissions in support of Falls and Clonard wards remaining within Court DEA on the basis of strong community ties, social and employment links. Furthermore, it was highlighted that access does occur between Clonard ward routes into Woodvale along the peace line as well as from the Falls to the Shankill ward, particularly along Lanark Way.

The issue of polling stations and their locations was raised.

With regard to the issue of Beechmount, he contended that this area was more affiliated with St James, the Iveagh area and Ballymurphy. This was through community groups and partnerships. Furthermore, he contended that Oakman Street was a natural boundary between Clonard and Beechmount.

Ciaran Beattie from Beechmount Residents Association expressed his view that Beechmount is inextricably linked with the rest of the Blackmountain DEA as opposed to the wards of Shankill and Ballygomartin and Woodvale.

Furthermore, he stated that the number of residents that signed a petition in support of Beechmount being placed with Clonard and Falls is small in the context of there being 6000 residents.
2.20 Harry Connolly of Upper Springfield Federation of Residents Association spoke at the inquiry to highlight the degree of mingling that occurs between Beechmount and Ballymurphy residents on a daily basis in employment, social and sporting terms. He also pointed out that the vacant site at Beechmount Leisure Centre is earmarked for redevelopment and as such will bring the communities closer.

2.21 Sean Quinn spoke as secretary of The Blackie Community Centre and expressed his view that he sees Beechmount as being part of the Blackmountain area and that this view arises from his position on the board of the Blackie Centre.

2.22 Breige Brownlee, spoke in her capacity as Chairperson of St James Community Forum and member of the management of St John’s Youth Club. She expressed surprise that an earlier presentation had not mentioned the St James, Rock Streets and Beechview Park with regards to the Beechmount identity. She argued that the main arterial routes that residents identify as joining the Beechmount ward are the Whiterock Road, Falls Road, Donegall Road. It was stated that the people from St James and Rock Streets would never regard themselves as “Lower Falls”. Detail was given as to the level of co operation between community groups within the area of St James, the Rock Streets and along the Whiterock Road. The issue of Beechview Park being split by the ward boundary was highlighted. Reference was made to the church parishes and that the aim should be to join communities not create borders and divisions.

2.23 Fra Hamilton from Beechmount Residents Association made a submission to express his view that people from Beechmount would never affiliate themselves with the Lower Falls. School links between Beechmount and the Whiterock were highlighted and parish affiliation. Information was given as to the future development of the Beechmount Leisure Centre site which is being conducted in association with Upper Springfield and Whiterock. It was submitted this will serve to reinforce the links between the Beechmount and Whiterock areas.

2.24 Claire Canavan on behalf of Clonard Residents Association highlighted the strong cross community infrastructure between Falls and Clonard, and the Shankill, Woodvale and
Ballygomartin areas. In addition, it was submitted there exist strong sporting and employment links which are based in Clonard and Falls with employees travelling from the Shankill, Woodvale and Ballygomartin areas. The sharing of schools, parks and leisure facilities between Falls and Clonard were highlighted. The DUP representation that Clonard should move out of Court DEA was objected to and was considered as politically motivated. It was stated that there are two access points between Clonard and Woodvale, contrary to the DUP submission, and they are Lanark Way and Workman Avenue. However, additional access is available from Clonard ward to Ballygomartin along Springvale Gardens, West Circular Road and Highcairn Drive. The argument that Clonard does not include city centre areas did not stack up as neither do Forthriver, Ballygomartin and Woodvale.

2.25 Terry Quinn from the Falls Residents Association submitted at the inquiry that Falls and Clonard are a distinct area and are known as the Lower Falls. They are linked by the Falls Road which is the economic hub between the two and, furthermore, they have common sporting, religious affiliations and historical links. Cross community events occur linking Falls and Clonard. And that there are no social or economic differences and that they have shared experiences.

2.26 In his view, the motive behind the DUP proposal to move Clonard ward out of Court DEA is to cause confusion and lower voter participation.

2.27 Sean Lennon, Chairperson of Lenadoon Neighbourhood Partnership and Glen Collin Residents Association in addition to being a member of Lenadoon Community Forum expressed his concern at the DUP proposal to take Collin Glen ward from Blackmountain DEA and transfer it to into Collin DEA. He stated that Collin Glen ward has more in common with Andersonstown through sports and community infrastructure.

2.28 It was highlighted further that the boundary of the Collin Glen River is a natural one, which is overlooked by Blackmountain, the name of the DEA into which it has been placed as compared to the Collin Mountain which is located further away and which overlooks the Collin area. The Collin Glen River
always been a geographical boundary, for policing and Lisburn Council policies.

2.29 Peter Lynch, from Tar Na Community made a representation concerning the DUP and SDLP proposals. In particular, he suggested that there are main arterial routes and natural and easily identifiable boundaries for the Clonard and Beechmount wards, with school buildings providing a boundary too. However, it was accepted that Mica Drive and Cluain Mor estate splits are not ideal nor is the separation of Nansen Street from Falls ward, but the wards are building blocks upon which to build and that all the councillors will be working together in Belfast City Council.

2.30 He argued that the DUP proposal to remove Clonard ward from Court DEA would make the deviation from the electoral average -2.2 % which is worse than provisional recommendation of -0.9%.

2.31 He also argued that the DUP suggestion to take Collin Glen out of Black Mountain DEA and place it in Collin will result in the actual Black Mountain being removed from its namesake DEA. Support was given for the view that the provisional recommendations had been done fairly well in terms of west Belfast.

2.32 Mr Gerry McConville of Falls Community Council during his submission said he treated the DUP proposal for moving Clonard from court with suspicion due to the knock on effect. In addition, he expressed scepticism about the proposal to move Collin Glen ward from Blackmount DEA which would remove the actual Blackmountain from its namesake DEA. Finally, as regards the proposal that Beechmount be transferred to Court DEA, he indicated the strong community links between Whiterock and Beechmount as opposed to the Falls and supported this with details of community consultations on projects dealing with the areas of Whiterock and Beechmount together.

2.33 The Alliance Party made a submission stating they were broadly content with the proposals for this area.
Conclusion

2.34 With regard to the DUP proposal, I consider there is not sufficient evidence to merit a change to the provisional recommendations concerning the content of Court DEA ward. As a result, I do not consider there is a basis for amending the DEA wards of Blackmountain and Collin.

2.35 Court DEA is a newly formed electoral area and includes areas from the original Lower Falls electoral area. The provisional recommendations for the Court DEA make for a more compact electoral area. There is a common link between Clonard and Falls wards with the Falls Road being a shared arterial route. Furthermore, I do consider there are access points in existence between Clonard and Woodvale, in addition to those between Shankill and Falls and this strengthens the submission highlighting existing links between these wards in Court DEA.

2.36 As regards the proposal to move Collin Glen ward from Blackmountain into Collin DEA, I consider that the Collin Glen River is an easily identifiable boundary and the proposal to remove the geographical feature after which the DEA is named, Blackmountain, would be inappropriate. In addition, the Collin DEA appears to take its name from the geographical marker of the Collin mountain.

2.37 Secondly I have considered the arguments concerning the proposals for Beechmount ward. The proposed District Electoral Areas of Court and Blackmountain have been newly created, differing significantly from the original framework. On examining the proposed Court DEA delineation I consider it does fit with the aim of the provisional recommendations in the creation of a geographically compact area. Court DEA appears compact in shape and the suggested addition of Beechmount ward would detract from this.

2.38 Furthermore, I am inclined to accept the M1 Motorway Boundary as a more easily identifiable boundary for the Blackmountain DEA and do not find the area of Bog Meadows and St Louise’s College more readily identifiable and justifiable as a boundary for the Court DEA.
On reaching the boundary area of Clonard and Beechmount DEA at Broadway, I consider there is a sense of transition away from one district into another. The presence of a high degree of educational buildings adds to this. In addition the road topography heading southwards at Broadway adds to the sense of transition.

In conjunction with the previous conclusion, in terms of the local arguments in connection with the proposal to move Beechmount ward, I have not been convinced that there is justification for changing the provisional recommendations. The argument that Beechmount ward should be placed in Court DEA due to geographical closeness, existing boundaries, close community and social links it has with Clonard ward, was not as strong as the points made to support the proposal for Beechmount remaining in Blackmountain DEA. On conducting site visits I observed on the ground how the ward boundary lines are drawn. The provisional recommendations commented on how the division of settlements was not always avoidable when facing the statutory and policy constraints and this is particularly evident in this area.

Submissions were made concerning the ward separations at Mica Drive and Beechview Park. With regard to Mica Drive, emphasis was placed on its close proximity, community and social links with Clonard ward. In turn arguments were presented concerning the area of St James, the “Rocks” and Whiterock Road, highlighting their close proximity to the Blackmountain DEA in terms of a shared arterial route of Whiterock Road which facilitated social, community and sporting links.

Having considered the objections concerning the splitting of the area of Beechmount estate, whilst I acknowledge there exists a degree of dissatisfaction among some residents about not being part of Clonard ward and Court DEA, an accurate level of opposition is hard to quantify. As such the amount of weight that can be attached to such evidence is limited.

I consider Oakman Street as a feature which indicates a move from one district to another. I am aware of the ability to enter the Cluain Mor from Beechmount but this is not an obvious or direct access route.
2.44 I have considered the arguments concerning the issue of the lower Whiterock and ‘Rocks’ areas and I am persuaded by the argument that they possess strong identifiable links with the general Whiterock area, which is now included in the Ballymurphy ward.

2.45 On conducting site visits and considering the evidence presented before the inquiry, I accept there is an identifiable connection between the lower Whiterock and upper Whiterock (which is split at Beechview Park). There is a shared arterial route, the Whiterock Road, and many associations with the Whiterock area in many street names not to mention recreational, educational and health centres buildings having Whiterock connotations. There does appear to be a high degree of residential and community work being conducted across the wards of Ballymurphy and Beechmount. This evidence helps support the contention that an established settlement exists between the two wards of Ballymurphy and Beechmount. In conclusion, on the basis of the foregoing it appears appropriate that both wards remain in Blackmountain DEA as set out in the provisional recommendations.

Recommendation

2.46 I recommend no change to the provisional recommendations.

EAST BELFAST

2.47 Alex Maskey, Sinn Fein MLA for South Belfast made written and oral submissions to the Public Inquiry. These involved his concern at the provisionally recommended make up of the Titanic, Botanic, Lisnasharragh and Ormiston DEAs, given the population figures, projected population growth and age profile according to the 2011 census. At the inquiry detail was given supporting the contention that, by virtue of the provisional recommendations not using census figures, this will result in quite considerable future disparity in South and East Belfast electoral areas. Furthermore, it was felt that the boundaries in
the provisional recommendations failed to take account of community connections between certain areas such as Ravenhill, Botanic and Rosetta.

2.48 Mr Maskey proposed;

- Moving Rosetta ward from Lisnasharragh into Botanic DEA based on community, sporting and ecclesiastical links between Rosetta and Ormeau wards.
- Moving Ravenhill ward from Lisnasharragh into Titanic DEA on the basis of projected population growths around the Titanic quarter and Lagan area.
- Transferring Shandon ward from Ormiston into Lisnasharragh DEA in order to compose a 5 and a 6 ward area.
- In addition he felt these proposals would provide more adequate electorate /councillor ratio deviations.

2.49 At the inquiry, during discussions, Mr Maskey emphasised that the issues he raised should be considered as additional conditions to be examined by the Commissioner and not as a replacement of the criteria that were set out in the provisional recommendations.

2.50 Castlereagh Borough Council was represented at inquiry by Councillor Vitty, Councillor McGimpsey and Stephen Reid, Chief Executive. Mr Reid indicated that Castlereagh Borough Council had given them a mandate to come before the inquiry to respond to the written submission made by Mr Maskey, Sinn Fein MLA. In particular, it was intended to highlight the effects of any transfer of areas, which form the current Castlereagh Borough Council, and which now feature in the new Belfast City Council area. He also indicated that there was unanimous cross party support for the provisional recommendations.

2.51 Cllr Chris McGimpsey stated that they considered the use of ‘readily identifiable boundaries by the Commissioner in the provisional recommendations as reasonable. It was highlighted that Sinn Fein have rejected the use of this criterion in this particular instance but not others. That the use of criteria such as sporting community and ecclesiastical links do not form part of any criteria laid down by the provisional recommendations.
Detail was given outlining that a full ecclesiastical infrastructure exists which would not restrict availability for church goers if ward transfers were not made. Further points were based on the sporting provisions available throughout Ravenhill and Rosetta wards. The point was made that the use of community, sporting and ecclesiastical links as criteria to join electoral wards was spurious and that the true motive for moving wards in the Sinn Fein submission was for electoral gain.

It was submitted that, if considering future population growth in, say, Ormiston ward, new younger families would be moving in as a result of the development of brownfield sites and this would address the issue of an aging population. Furthermore, that the transfer of a large ward such as Ravenhill to Titanic DEA is illogical, given the projected population growth for Titanic. Finally, the Shandon ward is linked closely with Ormiston, with religious and community links with Gilnahirk and Sandown in addition to the natural boundary of the Glen Road. Shandon, Gilnahirk and Sandown areas share transport and commercial links.

Gerry McConville, Director Falls Community Council made written and oral presentations to the public inquiry. Disappointment was expressed at the fact that the most recent census figures were not taken into account in the Commissioners determinations. There was a welcome for the provisional recommendations relating to West and North Belfast, but there was a request for the rest of Belfast to be dealt with more equitably.

It was pointed out that Ormiston and Lisnasharragh had fewer electors than Blackmountain and Collin DEA’S and, as a result, elect one fewer councillor. Also, when the census figures are factored in to the electoral figures, the deviation will increase even more over the next ten years, with an alleged increase in the difference between East and West of three seats. This discrepancy will be in favour of unionism.

Mr McConville proposed the following to reduce the deviations in electorate by
• Moving Rosetta into Botanic DEA, on the basis of community, sporting and ecclesiastical links.
• Transferring Ravenhill into Titanic DEA on the basis of projected population growths around the Titanic and Lagan quarters.
• Moving Shandon ward into Lisnasharragh from Ormiston in order that five and six ward groupings are formed.

2.57 James Irwin on behalf of Markets Development Association criticised the boundary changes as being designed to decrease nationalist representation in the wards and as blatantly sectarian. He highlighted the issue concerning councillor representation for Ormiston and Lisnasharragh compared to Black Mountain and Collin DEAs. He recommended the proposal to transfer the Rosetta ward to Botanic DEA to create a six seat DEA citing sporting, community and ecclesiastical links between the two. Furthermore, he supported the proposal to move Ravenhill into Titanic DEA on the grounds of population growth and that Shandon should be placed in Lisnasharragh DEA in order that five and six seat DEAs of Lisnasharragh and Ormiston are created respectively.

2.58 Phil McDonnell of the Markets Development Association made a written submission highlighting concern at the most recent census figures not having been used in the determination of DEAs in the provisional recommendations. He requested that community and public input be greater in the determination of DEA’s and stated that, if one looks at the census data, it is clear that changes in demography may lead to a high discrepancy in council seats within Belfast City Council, therefore leading to a political imbalance. He requested that alternative proposals are put in place to address deviations and create a more equitable system.

2.59 Cllr Chris McGimpsey, in his submission on behalf of Castlereagh Borough Council, highlighted the contradiction in Sinn Fein proposing to transfer the large ward of Ravenhill into Titanic DEA in light of the projected population growth for this DEA.
Conclusion

2.60 The arguments submitted concerning community, sporting and ecclesiastical ties to be included as additional considerations in the grouping of electoral wards were not persuasive. Although there may be a degree of substance to such representations, community identities are difficult to evaluate and as a result the value of this evidence is limited. This type of information may be of use if presented to support other criteria contained in the provisional recommendations. But this has not been the circumstances in this case.

2.61 Furthermore, the submission concerning the provisional recommendations not having used the census figures in the methodology for councillor /electorate ratio deviations is not accepted. Firstly, it appears that the formula used in the determination of these figures has been accepted in the main, as no other objections have been raised other than in the Belfast Local Government District, specifically in the area of East Belfast. Secondly, it does appear more appropriate for the provisional recommendations to use the latest electoral figures. Wards boundaries have already been settled and the figures compiled from these wards are beyond the scope of this inquiry. The provisional recommendations outline how the latest electoral figures were used for each ward. The use of definitive electoral figures appears appropriate in contrast to the suggested use of census figures which provide numbers for projected electoral population.

Recommendation

2.62 I do not consider there is merit in the arguments for community, sporting and ecclesiastical links to be included as considerations in the provisional recommendations. I do not recommend a change to the recommendations for the Botanic, Titanic, Lisnasharragh and Ormiston DEA’s. In addition, I do not consider the provisional recommendations should use census data with electoral figures to determine the deviations from electoral ward averages.
3. DEA Name

Titanic DEA

3.1 The DUP in a written submission requested that the Titanic DEA retain the name of Victoria DEA. It was proposed that the name Titanic should be reserved as a potential ward name. It was argued that the name Victoria is associated with a substantial local feature of Victoria Park.

Conclusion

3.2 I have considered the issue of renaming Titanic DEA. The provisional recommendations have outlined the factors used when naming DEA’s. These include using existing names, if appropriate, but, where there was significant difference between the old and new DEA, it was felt a new name which had a resonance by reference to place names or geographical features could be used. In this case I consider the creation of a distinctly new DEA in the form of Titanic DEA merits a new name and I consider the name of Titanic to have appropriate resonance.

Recommendation

3.3 There is no recommended change to the name of Titanic DEA.

Other issues

3.4 The Alliance Party submitted in writing broad contentment with the provisional recommendations.

3.5 The Ulster Unionist Party expressed the view that Belfast District Council should include parts of the current Castlereagh, Lisburn and Newtownabbey Council areas. This issue is outside the scope of this inquiry as the composition of the local
government districts has already been established by the Local Government (Boundaries) Order (NI) 2012.
4. **Summary of Recommendations**

DEA Ward groupings

4.1 No changes recommended.

DEA names

4.2 No changes recommended.

Acknowledgements

4.3 I should like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all those who submitted written representations and attended the Public Inquiry Hearing for the effort which they put into preparing their evidence and for the helpfulness with which they engaged in the proceedings.

4.4 My thanks go also to each of the members of the DEAC secretariat who supported me in conducting the public hearings and administratively in preparing this report.

Eileen Brady
Assistant District Electoral Areas Commissioner
Appendix A

WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

Alliance Party of NI
Comhairle Phobail na bhFál (Falls Community Council)
Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)
Markets Development Association
Alex Maskey MLA (Sinn Féin)
Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)
Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)
ORAL SUBMISSIONS

Ciaran Beattie (Beechmount Residents’ Association)
Breige Brownlee (Chairperson of St. James’s Community Forum)
Claire Canavan (Clonard Residents’ Association)
Harry Connolly (Upper Springfield Federation of Residents’ Association)
Fra Hamilton (Beechmount Residents’ Association)
James Irwin (Markets Development Association)
Councillor Colin Keenan (SDLP)
Sean Lennon (Chairperson of the Lenadoon Neighbourhood Partnership)
Peter Lynch (Tar Annall)
Alex Maskey MLA (Sinn Féin)
Fra McCann MLA (Sinn Féin)
Gerry McConville (Director of Falls Community Council)
Councillor Chris McGimpsey (UUP)
Sean Quinn (Blackie Community Centre)
Terry Quinn (Falls Residents’ Association)
Stephen Reid (Chief Executive Castlereagh Borough Council)
Councillor D Vitty (DUP)