Today the District Electoral Areas Commissioner, Richard Mackenzie CB, published his Provisional Recommendations for the make-up and naming of District Electoral Areas within the eleven new local government districts in Northern Ireland.

According to the legislation, District Electoral Areas must be made up of 5, 6 or 7 wards and the task of the Commissioner is to make recommendations for the grouping of wards into electoral areas for the purpose of local government elections. These proposals not only take into account the reduction in the number of Councils, from 26 to 11, brought about by the Local Government (Boundaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012, but also the resulting reduction in wards across Northern Ireland from 582 to 462.

Each ward represents a seat on the council - although councillors are not elected to a particular ward; they are elected to represent the District Electoral Area by a system of proportional representation. Thus an electoral area will be represented by 5, 6 or 7 councillors depending on the number of wards it contains.

Speaking about the proposals, Mr Mackenzie said:
“The publication of my Report today is the first stage in the process to establish electoral areas for the new local government district councils in Northern Ireland. My proposals represent a considerable change from the current pattern in some places due to the reduction in the number of councils and the consequent fall in the number of wards. However, in other areas there is a broad similarity with the existing pattern.”

The eleven new local government districts contain a total of 462 wards and the Commissioner has recommended that there should be 36 five ward electoral areas; 26 six ward areas; and 18 seven ward areas.

Today begins an eight week consultation period during which written representations must be received by Thursday 27 June 2013. Depending on the number and nature of representations which may object to the Provisional Recommendations, the Commissioner may arrange for public inquiries to be held in the autumn before independent Assistant Commissioners.

Encouraging the public to respond to the consultation, the Commissioner said:

“These proposals are an essential part of the electoral arrangements for the new councils and so I hope that as many people as possible will take the opportunity to comment on them. I am particularly interested to hear the views of local people where there are significant changes in the overall pattern of electoral areas.”

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Mr Richard H Mackenzie, CB was appointed as District Electoral Areas Commissioner in January 2013, by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (The Rt. Hon. Theresa Villiers MP).

2. The Local Government (Boundaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 established the boundaries and names of the eleven new local government districts for Northern Ireland and the number, boundaries and names of their constituent wards. Following on from this, the task of the District Electoral Areas Commissioner is to group those wards into District Electoral Areas for the purpose of local government elections.

3. Written representations are invited on the Commissioner’s Provisional Recommendations up until 2.00 pm on Thursday 27 June 2013 and should be sent to the Secretary, Office of the District Electoral Areas Commissioner, Forestview, Purdy’s Lane, Belfast BT8 7AR or by email to review@deac-ni.org.

4. Copies of the Commissioner’s Provisional Recommendations are available at a number of display venues throughout Northern Ireland including council headquarters, public libraries, Area Electoral offices, the Office of the Electoral Commission and the Office of the District Electoral Areas Commissioner. The Report is also available at www.deac-ni.org.

5. Where representations are received objecting to the Provisional Recommendations, the Commissioner may cause a public inquiry to be held as to the grouping of the wards in a district, and he must do so if the representations are made by an existing district council or by at least 100 registered local government electors in the district. After consideration of the representations and the recommendations of Assistant Commissioners who preside over any inquiries, the Commissioner will submit his final recommendations in a report to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.