Thursday 5th September 2013

District Electoral Areas Commissioner
Local Government District: Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon
Venue: Seagoe Hotel

Jane Watson: Ladies and gentlemen, just before the enquiry starts this morning, a few housekeeping announcements while we're here. We don't expect a fire alarm today, but if we do hear it please leave by the exit at the rear and staff will point us to the assembly point. If you need to use the facilities they’re out the door to the right at the end of the corridor and if I could ask that mobile phones are turned to silent mode during the enquiry as we are recording proceedings this morning. And without further ado I’ll hand over to Mrs Sarah Havlin, Assistant Commissioner for the inquiry. Thank you very much.

Sarah Havlin: Thanks Jane. Good morning everyone and thank you for coming today, you are very welcome. I’m going to go through some procedural matters if you’ll bear with me at the outset, just so that I can go through the procedure of this morning’s hearing and what to expect. I want formally, first of all, to open the public inquiry into the proposed District Electoral Areas for the local government district of Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon.

My name is Sarah Havlin and I have been appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to conduct this inquiry. I want to stress at the outset that I am independent of the District Electoral Areas Commissioner, Dick Mackenzie, so it's not my function to defend his recommendations here today. My role is to listen to and consider the evidence put forward at this inquiry and then I will be reporting my findings and my own recommendations to the Commissioner. Also I want to let you know that my recommendations will be made within four weeks of the close of this inquiry.

We don't plan to stop for breaks today but if anyone should have any requests for adjournments or requires an adjournment please do let me know and I can consider those. There are maps and documents for your consultation available; you'll see the copies of the Commissioner's provisional recommendations are available here. There are copies at the back of the room; there are also copies of all of the written representations which
relate to this district that have been made to the Commissioner during the eight week consultation period which ended on 27th June of this year.

I also want to point out that the inquiry is being recorded and that a transcript will be made available on the Commissioner’s website in due course. If anyone can’t access the website and wishes to receive a printed copy of the transcript of the hearing then please leave your name and contact details with a member of my support staff here and we will accommodate that. There are maps available in hard copy and on the screen behind me, which show the proposed grouping of wards into electoral areas so please do feel free to refer to those as part of your submissions today.

The purpose of this public inquiry is to consider representations concerning the provisional recommendations of the District Electoral Areas Commissioner for Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon. It should be noted that this inquiry has been convened to consider and hear arguments for and against the objections which have been raised to the Commissioner’s proposals during the consultation period which closed on the 27th June. So I just want to make it clear that any new objections which are unrelated to those already submitted during the consultation cannot be considered by me here today.

I also want to emphasise that you cannot reserve your position to await my report; it will not be possible for you to make any written or oral submissions to me or, indeed, to the Commissioner after the inquiry has concluded.

I know that some of you have already made written representations and I want to assure you that I have studied those carefully as part of my preparation for this inquiry and they will, of course, be taken into account in my report to the Commissioner.

Those of you who have already made written representations will want to elaborate on those representations today but I just want to make it clear that I’m not going to be assisted by constant repetition of written submissions. If you think you’ve already made your points fully in writing, you might simply wish to state that or, if you want to state that you support or oppose a particular recommendation for reasons that you’ve already stated
in a written representation. I will be taking full account of all written representations, regardless of whether or not you refer to them during the course of this inquiry.

I would be grateful if other speakers would try not to repeat points that are already put to the inquiry but simply formally record your support for views expressed previously if they have already been adequately expressed and that you just simply want to agree with that.

I also would ask you to help me by backing up your proposals with evidence, where possible, rather than relying on anecdotal points or unsubstantiated statements. It would be very helpful if you could point to features on the ground by use of the maps to let me know your evidence to back up your submission. Also bear in mind that, when making his recommendations, the Commissioner was constrained by the rules which are set out in the relevant legislation and those rules are also replicated in the report which is available at the back of the room. It is very important that we all understand that there are statutory constraints governing the process and to understand what those are.

There will be a number of issues that are outside the scope of this inquiry; I just want to mention some of those. The boundaries and the names of local government districts and their constituent wards are not part of this process, they have already been settled under the terms of the Local Government Boundaries Order 2012, and so I cannot consider any arguments about those.

Also the issue of the impact of the provisional recommendations on political representation is not something I can consider and I can't consider any issue which does not relate to the Commissioner's proposals for the grouping of wards within this particular local government district. So I would ask you not to raise those issues in your representation and you will understand that if you do raise them I will not be able to consider them as relevant considerations.

And so to the procedure that we will follow for the oral submissions. You'll be called to come up to the table in front of me here. We need everyone to speak into the microphones provided so that we can record everyone's contribution. Before
you speak, if you could please state your name for the record and tell us whether you're speaking in a personal capacity or if you are a representative and tell us what your representative capacity is and who you represent.

Your oral submission will be very helpful and will be of particular assistance if you're able to explain the reasons why you've taken a particular position, for example, tell me if you support an objection and counterproposal to the Commissioner's recommendation or if you support the Commissioner's original recommendation or if you're proposing an alternative to both and explain to me why. And then, when you finish, I may have some questions for you for clarification. Other people in the room may wish to put questions to you and I will permit questions to be put to you through me.

I want the inquiry to be conducted in an informal manner that is conducive to all of those who wish to contribute. So formal cross-examination is not appropriate at an inquiry of this nature; I'm very happy for questions to be put through me and I will facilitate the asking of questions.

In relation to site visits, I just want to let you know that I will go and view some of the areas under consideration and if there is a particular boundary or feature that you want me to look at then please do mention it to me during the course of your submission so I can take details of it and try to go and see it.

Please feel free to approach any of the staff here today if you have any questions or you need any assistance and they will draw the matter to my attention. I just want to check now before we start calling these speakers that all people who wish to speak today have registered their details with our registration team. Would that be right? There's no one here who has yet to register? Ok.

Well, thank you very much for your attention, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to start with the first speaker and that is Dolores Kelly. So if we could ask Dolores Kelly to come forward please.

Dolores Kelly: Do you mind if a colleague joins me?
Sarah Havlin: Not at all, please feel free. Just to remind you, if you wouldn't mind stating your name for the record before you speak.

Dolores Kelly: Yes. My name is Dolores Kelly; I am the Deputy Leader of the SDLP and currently MLA for Upper Bann. And I am joined by Cllr Joe Nelson who currently represents the Loughside ward which would be reformulated as the Lurgan ward.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you for that.

Dolores Kelly: Given your comments, Commissioner, we would want to make a couple of observations in relation to other submissions as well as to endorse those of our party. If I could just get some of the other recommendations out of the way first, in terms of some of the submissions of other parties; I understand that one party has asked that Magheralin be removed from Lurgan and put into the new Lagan River DEA and switched with Waringstown.

We would not be supportive of that because, as you can see from the map, Magheralin runs adjacent to Aghagallon which is within the new Lurgan proposed DEA and therefore I think it falls naturally that Magheralin should remain within Lurgan and Waringstown, which has a closer association with the area and Donaghcloney, should remain within Lagan River.

Sarah Havlin: So is that a DUP objection?

Dolores Kelly: I understood so, yes.

Sarah Havlin: And that's in relation to the swap of Waringstown ward and Magheralin.

Dolores Kelly: Yes, they're two distinct villages.

Sarah Havlin: And for the reasons you have outlined you would object to that?

Dolores Kelly: I think the map itself is self-explanatory. The other points, I understand that there's no differential can be made in terms of the number of representatives, that's set, so we'll move on to our own submission in relation to the villages and communities of Lawrencetown and Gilford, where it is proposed that Lawrencetown and Gilford become part of the new Lagan River DEA. That presumes an association and an affinity with the
villages of Donaghcloney, Quilly and right through to Dromore. We would be objecting to that.

Lawrencetown and Gilford have a close affinity and are part of the hinterland of the town of Banbridge. I understand that the Commissioner received a number of objections from residents in both of these areas. The people in Lawrencetown and Gilford send their children to school in Banbridge, at post primary, and also it tends to be the area where they associate in terms of shopping and other amenities and leisure pursuits.

We had proposed then, because you couldn't just ask for one ward to be taken out and one to go in, that Gransha, which is proposed to be within the Banbridge DEA, should come out of that and move back into the DEA of Lagan River. It is clear, from an association or identity of people, that Dromore is a busy market town as well and that that is the area that the majority of people from Gransha would attend. I think it would be fair comment that that's where their affiliations would lie.

So that basically was the substance of our proposal. It is based very much on local knowledge, on speaking to people on the ground. Given that the inquiry recognises that, with a much greater geographical spread in terms of our own DEAs, it's still important to retain some semblance of identity and linkage between communities and that is the reason for our submission. I don't see any point in labouring a lot of the points.

Sarah Havlin: No, I have the point. You are suggesting that on the basis of community ties, community links, that it would be more sensible and logical to move Gilford ward from Lagan River into Banbridge and then also to move Gransha ward out of Banbridge into Lagan River.

Dolores Kelly: That's correct.

Sarah Havlin: And you've given reasons for that in terms of Gilford's ties to Banbridge.

Dolores Kelly: Yes.

Sarah Havlin: And you feel Gransha would be a better fit with the rest of the wards in Lagan River?
Dolores Kelly: Yes, with Dromore in particular; there's a particular affinity with the town of Dromore.

Sarah Havlin: That's very clear. Is that the substance of what you wish to say to the inquiry this morning?

Dolores Kelly: Yes.

Sarah Havlin: Well if that's the case I would open it to any other people in the room who might like to ask questions about what has just been said. Would there be any questions at all? Yes, at the back there, if you wouldn't mind speaking into the microphone and giving me your name please.

JM: Yes, certainly. Can I just make the point?

Sarah Havlin: What is your name?

JM: Apologies. My name is Jonathan Murphy and I'm speaking solely as a member of the public.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you.

JM: The Gransha ward is quite a rural area and it identifies strongly with South Down so perhaps that could be considered in retaining it within the Banbridge area. It's more about Gransha's affinity with places like Rathriland and Banbridge than with Dromore. Dromore is not really quite South Down.

And the Gilford ward is made up of quite small villages which aren't in keeping with the character of the other towns and settlements in the Lagan River DEA; they're small villages whereas Gransha would be very rural. That's everything I would like to say, thank you.

Sarah Havlin: So just to clarify, you're supporting the provisional recommendations as they stand, yes? Well, thank you for that. Would anyone like to comment on that or have any further questions? Would you like to come back on that and then I'll come to you in a moment, madam; thank you.

Dolores Kelly: Well, it's always been the case that Banbridge as a district council area has been split between South Down and Upper Bann and I acknowledge that. However, I don't see that the
village and rural area of Gilford and Lawrencetown are any different to that of the Katesbridge and Rathfriland villages. I think you could say the same about either side.

CB: Cllr Carol Black, Banbridge District Council. I just want to support the Commissioner's recommendations.

Sarah Havlin: You support the recommendations as they stand in relation to this particular issue?

CB: Indeed.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you. Are there any other questions or would anyone like to speak on the issues that have been raised before? I appreciate if anyone has a submission they want to come up and make it, and that will be done in due course, but would you have any questions for these speakers at this stage?

BC: I take direction from the Commissioner.

Sarah Havlin: Could I have your name please, just for the record?

BC: My name is Brendan Curran and I represent Sinn Fein.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you.

BC: And I'm down to speak. We have made representations countering some of the objections and I can address them now.

Sarah Havlin: It will be possible for you to come forward to make your full submission to me but it might be helpful if you do have any questions or points of clarification for this speaker that you raise those now.

BC: I support the Commissioner's findings in relation to this area. I have more points on it and that's why I'll take your direction on whether to address them now.

Sarah Havlin: I see. Well, I think perhaps if you have a number of points and I do see that perhaps there is a divided opinion on this issue and I'm now aware of that, I think it might be easier if we take your submission on the issue. Then perhaps Miss Kelly would be able to ask any further questions or make any further submissions that she might want to at that stage.
Dolores Kelly: Yes, that's fine.

Sarah Havlin: Does anyone have any further questions for these speakers? Thank you very much indeed.

The next speaker on my list is Edward Hanna. Could I ask you to come forward, Mr Hanna, to make your submission and then we'll move to the next speakers? Thank you.

Edward Hanna: Thank you, Assistant Commissioner. I'm here to make a submission this morning on behalf of the Right Honourable Jeffrey Donaldson MP and Brenda Hale MLA.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you.

Edward Hanna: My name is Edward Hanna and I provide a research consultancy support to both the members. Again, the topic of this morning relates specifically to the proposal around Gransha ward being part of the Banbridge DEA. Just from the outset, both members would like to put on record that they would like to see it being taken out of that DEA and put into the Lagan River DEA.

Sarah Havlin: Gransha ward out of Banbridge and into Lagan River?

Edward Hanna: Into Lagan River. Assistant Commissioner, some of the background to the ward is that it lies between Dromore town in the north and Dromara Hills. It includes a very small rural settlement, Kinallen, Waringsford and Finnis, which borders the area. Indeed, the River Lagan flows right through the constituency so having it relating to the River Lagan ward or the Lagan River ward I think says a lot.

Indeed, any reasonable assessment of the local community, connections and infrastructure suggests that much of the ward and its population look towards Dromore rather than Banbridge for education, health and leisure, etc. Indeed there was some information submitted about this; it just wasn't people getting up and stating it; there has been some research done on this.

We looked into the local primary schools; we used Fair Hill Controlled Primary School, which is in Kinallen, and within the submission you'll see a table. The information shows post primary transfer and where the children go from post primary
school on to secondary school, and the best fit that that would show and reflect where the community see their educational support coming from. Overall, more than 70% of the children coming from within this DEA go to schools within the Dromore area, specifically Dromore High School.

Sarah Havlin: 70% of the children in Gransha ward?

Edward Hanna: The Gransha ward. 70% of the children that come from Kinallen Primary School or Fair Hill Primary School go on to receive their post primary education in Dromore. So that's the school leavers at the end of primary school, at the end of P7, who then go on to secondary school. 70% of children coming from Fair Hill Primary School go on to have their education within Dromore; the other 30% either go to Lisburn or go to Banbridge, so that's a fair idea that shows where the community lies on that issue.

We've also approached the local community groups, including Kinallen Rural Community Development Association, who have submitted a letter of support which I don't have with me this morning, but can submit to you. They represent the area of Kinallen and they're very much supportive of the change by which Gransha ward would go into Lagan River DEA.

Sarah Havlin: You don't have that with you today?

Edward Hanna: I don't have that with me this morning, no. We have consulted them; there has been a telephone call and the email was supposed to be with us this morning but that can be submitted to the Assistant Commissioner.

Sarah Havlin: I'm not sure whether we can do that if we close the inquiry. The rules state that when the inquiry is concluded we can't consider further evidence, I'm afraid.

Edward Hanna: Well, stating that as evidence this morning that a telephone conversation has taken place with the Kinallen Rural Community Group of which the Chair and the Vice Chair both stated their opinion in favour of going for the move which we've stated this morning.

Also having consulted with Dromore Rugby Club, which is probably one of the biggest sporting clubs in Dromore, I think that 67% of its players come from within the Gransha DEA and
80% of the leadership within the Rugby Club, the coaches and those that are involved in managing the club, come from within this DEA as well. So again, that shows an affinity that the people living within the Gransha DEA have a natural sporting affiliation and social affiliation with Dromore itself.

The last point is the electoral balance. As we sit at the moment, the new Banbridge DEA has seven wards, the Lagan River has five and it would make logical sense to balance the two areas and put Gransha into Lagan River, giving both Banbridge and Lagan River six wards each, thus giving an electoral balance across the two areas.

Sarah Havlin: So the submission would be that there would be six wards in Lagan River to include Gransha and that Banbridge would remain with the other six wards?

Edward Hanna: Yes.

Sarah Havlin: And what do you say then about the other comments this morning about the issue of Gransha and Gilford perhaps swapping as an alternative proposal? Do you have any comment on that or has Mr Donaldson got a view on that?

Edward Hanna: Mr Donaldson hasn't got a view on it. We have discussed it and looked at it. Again, it is a change from what Dromore, or what would be the new Lagan River DEA, now holds. Gilford and Donaghcloney were never part of that. It would be impossible to take both of those two wards out and not have something going back in because that would only leave us with four wards.

Sarah Havlin: Well, if Gransha is going into Lagan River, as you propose, then potentially that's a six ward DEA. So if Gilford came out it would leave five to include Gransha under your suggestion, if I were to agree with that. So Gilford coming out would leave Lagan River as a five ward DEA, with Gilford moving into Banbridge; so it's still possible because the statute says a minimum of five and a maximum of seven wards in a DEA. But I just wanted to clarify this, Mr Donaldson is not making the case that Gilford should come from Lagan River; you're saying that your submission is really moving Gransha into Lagan River to create two six ward DEAs.
Edward Hanna: Indeed. And the argument is reflective of the Banbridge DEA; we haven't looked specifically at moving other wards in and out.

Sarah Havlin: I don't think you have to because under the statute considerations, in terms of the five, six, seven rule, that's still a feasible objection to make. It's something obviously that I have to consider and look at the evidence in relation to those wards. Is there anything else you would like to add before I ask for any questions from the floor on this particular issue?

Edward Hanna: No. I think, Assistant Commissioner, that the points have been covered. You'll find yourself that the area has been historically associated with Dromore from 1972 and has continued that way through education, sport and social life. People may go to Banbridge but the natural affiliation within the large part of the Gransha ward is with Dromore and the community has, certainly in various ways, done that with their feet over that period.

Sarah Havlin: Alright, would anyone like to make any comment on what's been said? Yes, please. If you wouldn't mind stating your name again just so we know.

CB: Cllr Carol Black, Banbridge District Council.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you.

CB: I am a Dromore councillor at present and still have accepted what the Commissioner, what Dick Mackenzie, has proposed. I really would like to see the research on the schools. I do not believe that Katesbridge children would go to anywhere near Dromore or they would veer more to Banbridge. Most people in the Gransha area would veer to either, depending on which side, to Banbridge and even to Lisburn.

Just on Mr Hanna's recommendation about six councillors, Banbridge is the second largest town in Northern Ireland and I feel that seven councillors would be good value for the Banbridge district. In saying that, we do have a very rural area coming into the Banbridge district.

I do not support the fact that the children from Kinallen all come into Dromore. The schools do have criteria and there's many children that don't get into the Dromore area and that they have to veer into Lisburn and into Banbridge Academy as well.
Sarah Havlin: Thank you very much. Would you like to say anything in response to that?

Edward Hanna: Yes, certainly. Assistant Commissioner, the information has been presented to us by the Principal of Fair Hill Primary School. The statistics speak for themselves. Out of thirty two children that transferred last year, twenty went to Dromore High School, five went to Banbridge Academy, four to Friends, one to Wallace and one to Methodist College in Belfast; 70% of the children went to Dromore.

I do accept what the councillor said. Again, there is no anecdotal evidence to say that children going to Katesbridge wouldn't go to Dromore; it's talking and hearsay, this is evidential. This has been presented by the Principal to underline the argument, and the basis of the argument, that people specifically who go to school within this area go to Dromore and have that affiliation with Dromore.

I think the other thing too, and taking into consideration what has been said, is that the large part of the Gransha ward is within wee villages and hamlets, Kinallen and Waringsford and other parts. There is, I know, a gentleman here who said there is an affiliation of parts of Gransha to South Down and that tends to be a very rural part. Indeed I come from the rural part of Katesbridge myself and I have run a business and I've always had an affiliation with Dromore.

So there is some affiliation within the rural community to South Down but the vast majority of people living within the ward have an affiliation with Dromore. That's not to take away from what people are saying; there are people that do have that affiliation but I think if this is democratically looked at correctly it's a majority decision and the majority of the people living within that area are closest to Dromore.

Sarah Havlin: And just to be clear, I've got the points you've made about the intelligence that you have, about the people in the area and the community ties as part of your submission. Are you also making the submission that the features on the ground - you mentioned rural areas in Gransha ward - is it your submission that it is more appropriate for that ward to be included in the DEA, the target DEA of Lagan River, because of the rural characteristics?
Edward Hanna: Yes. I think too, as we’ve said, it has a historical tie with that area. We said obviously about the River Lagan running through it, so it gives a bit of continuity that the Lagan actually starts in Gransha ward and runs down through, so there’s a natural topography there with the ward. But I think it’s definitely around the linkages with Dromore that this submission stands on and I think if Dromore moves into this new Lagan River DEA then its natural brother or sister, as such, that sits alongside it should come along with it. And that’s to do with all the ties that we’ve talked about.

Sarah Havlin: Alright. Any further questions from the floor at this point? Yes, there’s a question there.

CB: Cllr Carol Black, Banbridge District Council again. If I could just point out for the record, there will be twelve councillors for the whole of the ABC grouping, that’s Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, so the voice will still be there regardless if it's six and six or five and seven, understandably, and that is to be noted. And whatever councillor is elected for each of those areas, I’m sure they will speak quite strongly for the Gransha, Lagan River or the Banbridge District Electoral Area. So I just want to put on record that it's still the same number of councillors that will be representing that particular area.

Sarah Havlin: What would you say about the nature of the ward of Gransha in terms of it being, as it looks to me on the map, like quite a rural ward? Would you say that it would be more appropriately grouped in an urban area like Banbridge or would you say that Banbridge is a mixed urban and rural area anyway?

CB: Exactly. Banbridge would be a mixture of rural and urban. Admittedly, it has a very rural setting and I have represented it for seven years. I must say that from the bottom part of it, it is veering into the Banbridge area more, so Katesbridge - if you draw a line right across - half of it is in the Banbridge district and the other part would be rural and would be veering into Lagan River. But given that Gilford is quite rural as well, you can quite clearly see that you’re linking it all into the Waringstown, Donaghcloney area. Donaghcloney is rural; this is a whole rural setting and the mileage right round the whole is quite considerable.
Sarah Havlin: Thank you. I think there was a lady there wants to make a point. Yes, thank you.

MH: Hello, my name is Marie Hamilton; I am a local councillor for Banbridge town. I would be in favour of Gransha going into Lagan River and Gilford and Lawrencetown coming into Banbridge. My reasons for that are the fact that Lawrencetown, as you can see on the map, is actually quite close to Banbridge and that Gilford and Lawrencetown are really well linked, the two villages, and, as such, they've always had an affiliation with the town and the people in the area. I do know that there would be some people who would be inclined to go towards Craigavon from Gilford but the majority of people have a strong link with the town and always have had, should it be even through marriage.

We would have a lot of local people in Banbridge who are married to people in Gilford and Lawrencetown and there's a strong affiliation between Banbridge town and that particular area and I wouldn't be in favour of it staying in Lagan River. But I would be in favour of Gransha because I feel that they have an affiliation with Dromore.

Sarah Havlin: So similar to the points earlier made by the SDLP?

MH: Yes. Well I'm also a member of the SDLP but I think in this particular case I can see their points on Gransha going in with Dromore. But as I say, from somebody who is local to the town, there's a stronger affiliation with Lawrencetown than with Gilford.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you very much indeed. A question from a member of the public there at the back; thank you. Could you just state your name again for me before you speak?

JM: Jonathan Murphy, member of the public. Could I just point out that in my experience as a member of the Policing Community Safety Partnership - though I should stress that I'm not here to represent them - if you look at the map there, the Gransha ward as we've all said is quite rural, the eastern part of Banbridge East round Corbet, even most of Loughbrickland, is very, very rural. So in my experience of rural policing, the crime issues even in those areas would be very similar.

But if you go into the Dromore area, Dromore, Gilford, Donaghcloney, particularly Dromore and Gilford, they're areas
that are small towns, very small towns but they’re towns and their issues would be different to the issues faced in Gransha, the eastern part of Banbridge East and most of Loughbrickland. I realise that the Banbridge DEA will involve most of Banbridge town which is obviously very urban.

But I feel that, even when we’re coming to election time and the democratic process, the issues will be similar across the Gransha, Banbridge East and Loughbrickland areas, whereas they wouldn’t be similar in the Gransha and the Dromore area, for instance. That’s just my own personal experience. Thank you.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you. Would you like to say anything in response to that?

Edward Hanna: I think you’ll find, and some of the councillors will probably comment on this too, that the same issues policing-wise that are dealt with in Gransha will be dealt with in Dromore, although Dromore is a small town, and again, outside of the town itself. The vast majority of people are farmers and rural dwellers and deal with the same issues as most people deal with in Gransha, so the policing is mainly, I think I’m right, controlled from Banbridge for most of the area, so I don’t see policing being any different, regardless of what DEA Gransha is finally placed in.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you. Yes, you want to come back on that course?

JM: Jonathan Murphy again. Can I just make clear that my example of policing was just an example of a policy issue; I'm sure in other policy issues there would be a similar affiliation between Gransha and the rural parts of Banbridge DEA, as proposed, compared to Gransha as compared with Dromore, etc. So it was just an example of one policy area.

Sarah Havlin: Sure. Thank you. Any further questions for this particular speaker or on this particular objection? Yes.

BC: Brendan Curran. I'll comment on this now as it is a relatively new submission. There are a number of schools, and I don't question the facts about Kinallen School, but there are maintained schools in Dechomet, in Finnis, in Leitrim and in Annaclone, all of which draw pupils from this area. So the figures are misleading in that sense; there are a lot of other pupils that come from the area who don't seek their post primary education in Dromore. They would
go to Banbridge, Castlewellan or even Newry and, in some cases, as far away as Armagh.

I would have a major concern just about the geographical size of the DEA that would result from putting Gransha into it and I would reject the argument that the change has anything to do with rural or urban because if we just look at the map, at Gransha, and we look at Loughbrickland, we can see the similarity in size, the similarity presumably in population or population spread. So they fit in naturally together.

Having relatives there, my mother came from the Katesbridge area and I don't think she would have taken kindly to have been told that Dromore was her home town because Rathfriland was always the home town. So I would just in general disagree with the argument and I would like to put forward those points. Thank you.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you very much

CB: Cllr Carol Black, Banbridge District Council. Just going back on the PSNI point, Dromore, Rathfriland, the small rural hamlets and towns and villages all come under the Banbridge auspice of policing, so that isn't an argument. I would like to state again that the Commissioner has brought forward new boundaries for new council areas; this is not all about one place anymore.

What used to be has gone and we are now trying to move forward with this new proposal and we are trying to make better representation. Rural and urban do match and bond together, rather than keeping very rural very rural, and even more rural, if you want to put it like that.

So if we're going to argue about rural, Ballyward has been just left off the map altogether because it's now gone into South Down and that's part of my area as it sits. If I go from the tip of Gransha, the very far point and go the whole way down to the bottom, that's a heck of a lot of rural setting and obviously the Ballee Ward is more the Banbridge, Castlewellan area, so it makes sense that that would be going into the new Newry area.

So I just wanted to state again that these are new boundaries, new evidence. We are now moving into a different era altogether and what is sitting right now at the moment is not going to be,
and the Commissioner has already stated that. And I do want to state again that the Commissioner is correct in his findings.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you for that. Was there someone else who wanted to speak at this point? No further questions for this speaker? Thank you very much, if I could ask you to take your seat again.

Cllr Carol Black, I think you're down to make a submission so could we ask you to come forward now to do that? Thank you.

Carol Black: Good morning. Cllr Carol Black, Banbridge District Council. I'm speaking as a councillor for the area at the moment but this is just on a broader note. First of all, Belfast will have sixty councillors with 3,572 approximately per council.

The new proposed Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon will have forty one councillors with roughly 3,397 per councillor, which is 175 persons of a difference and I can't understand why there's sixty councillors in one area and forty one in the other representing the new ABC. Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon will be the second largest council for the whole of Northern Ireland and yet we've only got forty one councillors.

Sarah Havlin: Yes, I'm afraid I can't consider those arguments because they're settled by the previous legislation.

Carol Black: And that's fine but I just want to make that point. I feel that the proximity, because Belfast is so closely knit while the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon is very rural, and time wise, travel, the whole setting, the rural setting, I just can't fathom how it's going to save money.

My second point was that we're at a disadvantage as regards our council area because we are a rural setting and from the full travel perspective, we're totally at a disadvantage.

I would like to say in the Northern Ireland Act 2008, there was discretion to increase and decrease by at least two to three wards. I feel that we should have been given extra councillors for our district, for the ABC grouping.

Sarah Havlin: Well, I appreciate that's your opinion on that but it's not something I'm going to be able to consider as part of this process.
Carol Black: I understand that.

Sarah Havlin: I was interested in the comments that you made - and this issue has been brought up by other speakers and it's something that I am going to be looking at and that's this issue; I think you've spoken about it quiet extensively this morning already, but it's the issue of Gransha ward and there's also another issue about Gilford ward as well. Now you've made it clear that you support the recommendations as they currently stand, as made by the District Electoral Areas Commissioner. Is there anything further you want to add for me to consider about that particular argument or do you feel that it's already been presented in full?

Carol Black: No, I feel it's been covered quite well this morning and it's up to the information collected this morning as to your findings and your report.

Sarah Havlin: I just wanted to clarify a few things. I appreciate a lot of the evidence that was given this morning focused on this idea of community ties, that some people in the Gransha Ward are looking towards Dromore and that would mainly be in the north area of that ward. Is that correct? Then there's another argument coming across that the people in the southern part of the Gransha ward, in Katesbridge and Annaclone, are naturally looking towards Banbridge.

Carol Black: Exactly.

Sarah Havlin: And I think from what I heard, from what you were saying, and perhaps you agree that is the case, there is perhaps a split there but that you feel the provisional recommendations are acceptable because it's a new situation, we're moving into new boundaries.

Carol Black: Exactly. And I mean, there's change all over Northern Ireland, it's not just all about Gransha or all about Banbridge. I'd be very sad to see Gransha leaving my ward as it stands but I am in a brand new era here and I can honestly assure you that from the Ulster Unionists’ point of view, our councillors who are elected will speak on behalf of wherever they represent so the representation is still going to be the same whether it's six/six or five/seven, whatever way you wish to do your maths.
I feel that there is a split if you take a diagonal. Finnis is actually moving into the new - is it South Down? - and Dromore is moving into Lisburn and Castlereagh. So you're just talking about a border and unfortunately that's where Dromore actually lies, on the border of Lagan Valley and Banbridge and you can say Upper Bann or you could say Lagan River.

Dromore is one of those unique places, and Quilly, that would be sitting in and around there. Are we Lagan Valley or are we Upper Bann? It's a border area but I feel that, if we're speaking about rural, Moneyslane and Ballyroney, they're all moving into the proposed new area, the Banbridge district.

Sarah Havlin: Of Banbridge.

Carol Black: Yes. And it makes more sense that Gransha, the bottom end of it, is moving in around. If you look at the new proposed area where Dromore, Quilly, Donaghcloney- if you could just highlight that on the map, the Dromore, Quilly, Donaghcloney, Waringstown and the Gilford, it's just sitting, you can see where the Commissioner has actually... That has been fair comment. The Waringstown and where he's bringing in around this bit here, he's swaying it around.

Sarah Havlin: And you see those as more natural boundaries, the way they're fixed there at present?

Carol Black: Yes, but as I state, I will miss my area that I've represented for quite some time now and councillors before me. But it's not about a particular area; every single ward, every single council area is being changed. This is a new and absolutely massive change for Northern Ireland and it's about your councillor who will be speaking for you in your area.

But I feel that we're at a disadvantage, going back to my first point, that we've got 41 councillors for the ABC grouping and for 3,397 electors and Belfast have 60 and there's only 175 more people per councillor. We are at a disadvantage before we even start and I just feel that we could have been given extra councillors, whether that's going to be for the Lagan River Ward, bring it on, or for the Banbridge, Armagh and Craigavon district, we as the second largest new council will be at a disadvantage before we even start.
So I just wanted that on record and I understand your point.

Sarah Havlin: It's not something I can consider but your point is on record. Is there anything further you want to add in terms of your submission before I ask anyone else for any questions?

Carol Black: No, I think I've covered everything and I think we've exhausted poor Gransha.

Sarah Havlin: Alright. Would anyone like to ask any questions at this stage about what has been said or ask the councillor for any points of clarification? Yes, the speaker there.

EH: Edward Hanna, Assistant Commissioner. If it's possible, could I say something in a personal capacity, having made a submission on behalf of the Right Honourable Jeffrey Donaldson MP and Brenda Hale MLA?

Sarah Havlin: You live in this area, isn't that right?

EH: I do, yes.

Sarah Havlin: Well you're making it clear that you're speaking in a personal capacity at this stage. Yes, please go ahead.

EH: It's actually a very good point that Carol and the councillor has made, it's that for the reasons of the Westminster elections Lagan Valley runs through Gransha; about half way through Gransha is where the MP for the area is elected, which is Lagan Valley.

Again, going back on the point that the SDLP made, Gilford and Donaghcloney have always had an affiliation with Upper Bann when it came to Westminster and it's for that reason that people have that personal attachment. Quilly, Dromore and Gransha, whilst their council elections have been to Banbridge, their Westminster elections have been to Lagan Valley. And the same with Gilford and Donaghcloney, they came into the Lagan River but their MP or Westminster elections are still going to be with Upper Bann.

And I think it's very confusing for the people on the ground living in Gransha ward, being part of Banbridge Council, that they are going to be part of the new ABC Council but yet when it comes to
Westminster Lagan River is your DEA beside you but you're not part of Lagan River and the concept of the Lagan Valley. But yet when it comes to Westminster everything changes again. It's very confusing for people voting that you see councillors coming from Banbridge and you vote for them but yet when it comes to Westminster and they're running again or moving up through the chain you can't elect them and you can't put an X for them.

I think it's for that very simple reason, simplicity with this is that yes, I know and I take what the councillor from Sinn Fein has said is that there is certainly people within the Gransha Ward who have an affiliation with Rathfriland and other parts of the area but the vast majority of people living in the DEA are within the hinterlands of Waringsford and Kinallen which have vastly grown over the last number of years.

Unfortunately I can't give you figures; it's not something that I looked at. But personally, having been round there for all my life, those two areas are probably the biggest in the Gransha Ward. And it's just that wee bit of simplicity and an opportunity to make things simple for the people on the ground now. And I know it will certainly put people out; I agree with what Brendan is saying, but this is about democracy and elections is about democracy and I think the majority of the people in there would certainly go the other way.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you. Carol, do you want to come back on that?

Carol Black: Yes, if I could just come back on that. For many years that's what I'm saying about Dromore sitting on a border area, if you would like to put it like that, from the Banbridge and the Upper Bann and Lagan Valley. It's always been like that; people will ask you, not everybody will ask you, they'll just know that they're in the Banbridge area, there are council areas in Banbridge but yet they're Lagan Valley MLAs or whatever.

If I could just go back to the border here of Kinallen. If we're talking about the border of Kinallen, Kinallen and Dromara could be going into could be going into the Lisburn, Castlereagh. Likewise the Dromore, are we into the Upper Bann or are we, you know. You could argue your point about that. There has to be a line and unfortunately if you're over the line or above; it's all over Northern Ireland, that really is not an argument.
Westminster seats, the boundaries weren't changing. This is not about the Westminster seating, this is about our local government and as a local councillor I've stated already on record that I really will miss the Gransha people because I've represented them for so long but this is all new and we are going to have to accept quite a lot of changes within the whole new local government and that's it basically. I don't wish to argue anymore about it.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you, councillor; that's very helpful. Any further questions for the councillor? Thank you very much indeed. Well, our next speaker on the list is Brendan Curran from Sinn Fein. Mr Curran if you want to come forward and take a seat please. Thank you.

Brendan Curran: Brendan Curran, I am representing Sinn Fein and I am also a councillor in Banbridge district. I have given in a copy of my submission.

Sarah Havlin: Yes, I have that here in front of me, thank you very much, it's very helpful.

Brendan Curran: And although a lot of the paper is not as bad as it seems, because what I've actually done for convenience was draw down the proposals from other parties, and they're in red and our response is in black. So I will deal with them in that order proposed from the DUP with regards to the Loughgall ward, and we would argue that the concept of an Armagh DEA is irrelevant.

Sarah Havlin: Perhaps I should just contextualise that just before you tell me about why you disagree with it, but basically the DUP position is that Loughgall ward should remain within an Armagh District Electoral Area because of the ties with Armagh city, isn't that right?

Brendan Curran: Yes.

Sarah Havlin: And you're objecting to that.

Brendan Curran: Yes. Because we feel, and it's already been said that we're in a new era, it's an entirely new concept and it's arguable that mixing the old areas or what were seen as the old areas is important in ensuring that new councillors take a holistic view within the new councils when making decisions for the new councils.
Portadown and Craigavon provide the shopping area of choice for the majority of Loughgall ward residents and it’s interesting to note that Loughgall Presbyterian Church, united with the congregation of Tartaraghan in 1963 and I have cited their website for this “this means that the church boundary straddled the Loughgall, Portadown wards as do those of the Roman Catholic Parish, which extends from Loughgall to Maghery and therefore goes from Armagh into Craigavon”.

The DUP proposal on Magheralin and Waringstown was that Waringstown be removed from Lagan River and go into Lurgan and that Magheralin goes from Lurgan to Lagan River and again, we disagree with that. The demography of both Waringstown and Magheralin is strikingly similar; their argument was that Waringstown was more urban but a glance at the map shows that there’s very little difference actually in size and therefore in population spread.

Magheralin would have a slightly larger area of sparsely inhabited farmland, much larger farms and much wealthier farms, I think. The civil parish of Magheralin extends along another strip to connect with the shores of Lough Neagh at Leansmount which is in the current Aghagallon Ward and, as a result, Magheralin people have a strong affinity with the Aghagallon district as well as with the town of Lurgan.

Magheralin people have a strong affinity with the Aghagallon district, both through sports and through church related activities, as well as with the town of Lurgan. Perhaps more interestingly is the fact that Waringstown forms part of the parish of Donaghcloney and again I’ve quoted a website which is the Genealogy Roots Ancestry website and within the church of Ireland its congregation it is known as Donaghcloney and Waringstown Parish.

It makes sense to leave this ward where it is and to maintain the whole parish within one DEA. And a point I have made later on is that electoral areas do not confer affiliation; parishes do; electoral areas are merely a means of actually organising people for an election.

From election management perspective and also from an aesthetic viewpoint, the switching of Magheralin and Waringstown would create a clumsy geographical area and I
think it much easier for both ourselves as political parties and for the Electoral Office if it is left as it is.

Sarah Havlin: So those are your submissions in relation to, first of all, this issue about the Loughgall Ward.

Brendan Curran: Yes.

Sarah Havlin: And then there's a second issue about Magheralin and Waringstown. I wonder if we could leave those to one side just for the moment because we might need to open a debate on those issues for other speakers to comment on because I think another part of your submission relates to the issue that a lot of other speakers have touched on this morning and that's the Gilford and Gransha issue.

Brendan Curran: Yes.

Sarah Havlin: So do you want to take me through your submission in relation to that and then perhaps we can open that to any other speakers if there's anything more that needs to be added in relation to that particular aspect?

Brendan Curran: The proposals presented by both the SDLP and by a Mr Moriarty are basically the same, so we just dealt with them as one proposal. The town of Banbridge would not constitute a DEA on its own; therefore the creation, because this is one of the arguments made about the rural/urban mix, of a distinct urban DEA is impossible.

Switching Gilford with Gransha won't resolve that issue, it won't actually make a difference to it. We are actually looking at a new diaspora within new councils and the concept of reinstating is non-existent because it spoke on one of them about reinstating it into the Banbridge area. That's just a nonsense, to be honest. Wards and DEAs are a method of grouping for electoral purposes and while local linkages make management and, in particular, the allocation of polling stations easier, wards nor DEAs do not confer affiliations.

Both proposals suggest strong Gilford/Banbridge links but yet the Roman Catholic Church ended its linkage between Tullylish, which contends with the Gilford Ward. Gilford Ward is all within Tullylish Parish and Banbridge town over one hundred years ago
and again, I have quoted the website which is www.tullylishhistory.com

The combined parish was subdivided, in 1851 the combined parish was subdivided and it displaced Tullylish and Saint Patrick became separate and distinct with Lawrencetown and Banbridge as their respective administrative centres. The current parish extends to both Donaghcloney and Waringstown, creating a natural linkage in the heart of Lagan River. The Church of Ireland and the Presbyterian churches also looked towards Donaghcloney rather than Banbridge.

Under Parish Pictures in the Tullylish Church of Ireland website www.tullylishparish.com and I've cited it. The Church of Ireland website lists Donaghcloney, which is part of the old Craigavon local government district, the old town Ballylough and Clare, which is part of the old Craigavon local government district, and Hunters Hill which is part of the old Craigavon local government district, as part of Tullylish parish, and that would actually bring you back into Waringstown and Bleary, interestingly enough.

The early congregation of Tullylish Presbyterian Church was actually sometimes known as Donaghcloney, so that entire area is basically within social circles seen as one. The Waringstown, Donaghcloney, Gilford area has a natural affinity. Contrary to the suggestion that the two proposals, that the main religious denominations sit naturally in Lagan River, Gransha on the other hand is a very large ward and as many residents would look upon Rathfriland or Banbridge as their home town as would look upon Dromore. And while we do accept some of the arguments that are made, I think in this case they are superfluous.

Sarah Havlin: So in this case you are supporting the recommendations as they stand?

Brendan Curran: Yes. And I would point out, and I should have at the start, have started by saying in our own submission that we have agreed with the findings of the commission. The only things we disagreed with or that we had reservations with was the name of Lagan River because while the River Bann flows through Gilford and the Lagan River flows to the other side, it's slightly unfair. We had proposed the name of Clanbrassil or Clann Bhreasail, depending on your choice. Clann Bhreasail is an old Irish name for that area, Clanbrassil is actually an earldom; it was the name
of the earldom that ran from roughly between Gilford and Portadown, Moyallen area right across to the shores of Lough Neagh at Leansmount, close to Aghagallon. So it roughly covers that area.

I would point out that actually although Lagan River starts in Gransha, so does the River Bann, so adding Gransha to that area would actually only confuse the issue in terms of name. And that's my submission on that.

I have two other responses if you want to take them now because they're relatively short.

Sarah Havlin: Is that moving onto a different issue in addition to other areas?

Brendan Curran: It is, yes.

Sarah Havlin: Before we leave your submission in relation to the Gransha issue and Gilford, if there's anything you've said on that that somebody in the room might like to comment on, just so that we can air this debate fully before we move on?

MH: Hello, my name is Marie Hamilton; I'm a local councillor in Banbridge. I could speak from a personal sort of view. I can't give you any great detail on this but the idea of Lawrencetown and Gilford that Cllr Curran had said about, as one hundred years from they sort of separated, I would be well aware from a parishioner's point of view that a lot of the local priests and so on in the areas would help each other out from Lawrencetown, Loughbrickland, Banbridge to cover holidays and so on. So there's still a great linkage; there would be from a parishioner point of view.

Sarah Havlin: A linkage between?

MH: Between Lawrencetown, Gilford, Banbridge, all of those small parishes. Also from a sporting point of view there would be a lot of interlinking sports groups within Lawrencetown, Gilford, Loughbrickland, Banbridge and so on. And as well as that, as I said earlier, a lot of the children in those areas after post primary come into Banbridge or go outside the area completely or to Newry; that I would know.
But there’s still this strong linkage with Banbridge town and I do not see them veering towards Dromore and Lagan River. So I still feel that in many ways we would be letting down the people of Lawrencetown and Gilford for them to go into a different area because of their strong links with the town. Thank you.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you.

JN: Thank you. I'm Cllr Joe Nelson; I'm currently a member of Craigavon Borough Council. We have heard talk here today of the supporting of a new dispensation and in fact the word diaspora was used. If we try to relate any new diaspora to a very ancient diaspora, which are the ecclesiastical dioceses, it doesn’t stack up for me personally because if you look at the parishes that we talked about they're actually in the Roman Catholic diocese of Dromore.

But so is Lurgan, which is very clearly an Armagh town; the parishes of St. Peter and St. Paul's are actually in Dromore diocese, not Armagh diocese. So if we are talking about a whole wipe the slate clean, start again, I find it difficult to try and relate that back to ecclesiastical parish boundaries that have been in existence for an extremely long time.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you. Any other points before we come back to this speaker?

EH: Edward Hanna. Just two points on what was covered, the idea of switching Gilford with Gransha, and it doesn't make any difference. I think it does make a big difference because the people in Gilford have an affiliation with Banbridge and, likewise, the majority of people in Gransha have an affiliation with Dromore. I think they said the recommendations are superfluous and I think it takes away from the people in the community who have appointed people today to come and represent them on their behalf.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you. Any further points that you want to make on this issue about Gransha and Gilford before we move on? Thank you.

Mr Curran, if you want to continue on with your submission, please?
Brendan Curran: Well, that was the end of it. I would just like to respond to some of the points made. I think I would accept what Cllr Nelson said and the points he made in relation to areas and the linkages and even the comments from Cllr Hamilton. But I think that proves my point, the same linkages could be made between most wards.

I can make exactly the same linkage between Loughbrickland and Markethill, between Loughbrickland and Rathfriland. Electoral areas do not confer social affiliations; they are an area to elect people to an election. We want to make them as handy as possible and as easy to operate for those who have to represent the areas in the future; that's their purpose.

The other linkages, so social linkages while they are important and while if we can get a boundary that goes around those social linkages like the old parishes, that makes our job that much easier because there's a natural affiliation. I actually come from Tullylish Parish; I was reared in Tullylish Parish. My natural hinterland was actually back towards Donaghcloney and Waringstown.

For people playing football within the parish, for church goers within the parish, that was the natural area; but it's irrelevant in some senses because this is about forming areas for elections, it is to do with figures and it is about getting the best that we can agree.

Now, some of the points that have been raised here today, yes, it would be great if we could get Westminster boundaries and assembly boundaries and local government boundaries that would all match each other but in ten years when the first commission would have to be held by law, that would change again because it is a numbers game and that's what we're working for. We are not working to suit people's social habits.

Sarah Havlin: I think there will be difficult areas. I think the Commissioner has set out in his approach that he would, where possible, try to create distinct urban and rural DEAs but I think you have said that in this area that's going to be impossible. I think you said, because of the nature of the area that there will have to be that urban and rural mix. But the Commissioner also in his approach was looking at the use of physical features in terms of creating the most natural boundary lines. Do you feel that the current
proposals reflect the features on the ground in preferring the boundary which brings Gransha into Banbridge?

Brendan Curran: I do. I think that is where the old parishes, which in most cases were civil parishes, do come into effect because they related generally to an area which had some form of natural affiliation, which is why they were chosen in the first place. So in that sense it does relate.

Sarah Havlin: In terms of your knowledge of the local area, are there geographical features that might particularly support that boundary line, hills or rivers?

Brendan Curran: No, you’re going into low ground as you leave Banbridge, so the landscape is somewhat similar the whole way across and it just gets flatter as you go down towards Lough Neagh.

Sarah Havlin: I think somebody might want to add a point here at this stage. Miss Kelly wants to speak at this stage just on that issue.

DK: Dolores Kelly, SDLP MLA for Upper Bann. It was just on Cllr Curran's point. He was trying to make the point about the parishes and I think the issue - I'm from Aghagallon - and it's the parish of Down and Connor if we're going into all of that for linkages.

The issue around features is quite right, that there aren't the features but I'm at a loss to understand as to how Tullylish looks towards Donaghcloney as its natural hinterland; it is not the case; it's more likely towards Bleary than towards Donaghcloney, I would have thought. And I don't think that our arguments have at all been superfluous.

And he was making the argument that the principles behind the establishment of the DEAs was about the organisation in terms of elections. I always thought and believed that the point of actually looking towards boundaries was actually about looking at the representation of the people and that local identity was a large feature in any of the considerations given by not only this Commissioner but other commissioners in the past. Therefore, the issue around identity in terms of schools, shopping, retail, leisure and sporting organisations is one that should certainly be one of the higher weighted considerations given by the enquiry.
Sarah Havlin: Thank you, would you like to respond at all, Mr Curran?

Brendan Curran: I don’t disagree that those factors should be taken into consideration but the fact that is most important is numbers; that we have an equal or as equal as possible a number of electors per elected representative and that has to be the major criteria. Now, how we achieve that is down to division, it’s down to mathematics and certainly all those other factors have to come into it but the reality is Gilford, Lawrencetown, Donaghcloney and parts of Waringstown all have a very close affiliation.

And I can recall, and this is anecdotal evidence and I know you don’t want it, but my father was a member of Tullylish GAA Club and he trained one of the youth teams and unfortunately I was regularly sent to collect some of his players and I would have been going to Donaghcloney, to the Black School and Drumavaddy to collect people to bring them to Tullylish Football Field, which was in Lawrencetown. I similarly also went to Waringstown to collect people to bring them to training sessions. It is a reality, there’s no disputing it.

Sarah Havlin: The numbers of the Gilford Ward and the Gransha Ward are much the same, Gilford 3,225 and Gransha 3,159, so if they were to switch it wouldn’t have much impact on the councillor to electorate ratio.

Brendan Curran: No, it wouldn’t have much impact on that; it does form a rather awkward area though because we are going round in a semi-circle and we are going right from the edge of Lurgan town to the very boundaries of the council area, almost to Castlewellan.

Sarah Havlin: So you feel that would be a clumsier boundary.

Brendan Curran: In my opinion, it’s a more clumsy boundary, whereas I believe the boundary as it currently exists, and we all would like to change all of the boundaries to make them more suitable for ourselves, but as it stands, it is as good, I believe, as you can get.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you for that. Comment from the floor.

MH: Thank you. Marie Hamilton, SDLP, Banbridge Councillor. I would say that whether it’s Gransha or Gilford, Lawrencetown, it will make very little difference to, as you said, a clumsiness because each one is on the end of the Lagan River. I would
agree with you on the numbers game; there’s only 66 votes difference between the two wards, Gransha and Gilford and Lawrencetown as it stands.

So from that point of view it will make no difference I do believe it's just an affiliation thing and I believe that each one if, they were swapped over, it will make all the difference to the population.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you. If we move back again to the earlier points you made in your submission, Mr Curran, in relation to, first of all the point you made in relation to the Loughgall Ward, the DUP objection to the Commissioner's proposals outlined that their position was that Loughgall Ward should remain within the Armagh District Electoral Area due to local ties with Armagh city and also that it was previously in the Armagh Council area.

The case of ties to Portadown does not match or overwhelm the bonds with Armagh so therefore a transfer is not appropriate to a Portadown based DEA. The mix of rural and urban of a Loughgall Ward make Cusher the more appropriate Armagh DEA for it to be contained within as it is similar to the other wards in that DEA.

And the Sinn Fein response was to reject that particular alternative proposal that was suggested by the DUP, isn't that right?

Brendan Curran: Yes.

Sarah Havlin: And you’ve outlined the reasons for that. I just wonder if there are any speakers in the room who also want to comment on that particular point. No. And no further questions on that? We have your submission in relation to that, Mr Curran; that is something that I will consider and look at as part of my examination of this area. Is there anything further that you want to add to that?

Brendan Curran: No.

Sarah Havlin: And then the other main issue that you raised with me then is in relation to the Magheralin and Waringstown wards.

Brendan Curran: Yes.
Sarah Havlin: The DUP position on that is in relation to, they say in the division of wards between the proposed Lurgan and Lagan River DEAs, the DUP believes the switching of Waringstown and Magheralin wards is necessary.

The Commissioner sets out in paragraph 3.6, "The desire for the creation of distinct urban and rural DEAs the more intense development of Waringstown would make it more appropriate to be included in the proposed Lurgan DEA. The less intense development and more rural nature of Magheralin Ward would make it more appropriate for the proposed Lagan River DEA, Magheralin is directly comparable in nature with the Gilford, Donaghcloney and Quilly wards which make up most of the proposed Lagan River DEA".

So that's the DUP position and your position is to disagree with that and to agree with the current proposal by the Commissioner, isn't that right?

Brendan Curran: Yes.

Sarah Havlin: Could I just ask if anyone else in the room would like to speak on that particular issue? Yes, thank you.

JN: Thank you. Cllr Joe Nelson, Craigavon Borough Council, representing the current Loughside area but living in Aghagallon ward. I would support the view taken by Sinn Fein on this that the affinity between Magheralin and Aghagallon is much closer than any potential affinity between Lurgan and Waringstown.

The rationale in that is that, and as someone who is a champion for the rural areas and knows how difficult it is to get services and support and money for development into rural areas, Magheralin is a rural village. But Magheralin, the rural affinity is something that is a great linkage and I think it has been stated quite clearly that there are linkages between the farming communities, there are social linkages, there are also intermarriage linkages.

I have to put my hand up and say I'm one of them because I had to go to Magheralin to find a wife. So that affinity is there that doesn't exist with Waringstown whatsoever.

Sarah Havlin: Yes, please go ahead.
DK: Dolores Kelly, SDLP MLA. Obviously Sinn Fein’s submission is similar to our own in relation to this particular proposal. The fact is, to travel into Lurgan from Aghagallon you actually cross part of Co. Down, which stretches into Magheralin. The Kilmore bit is very much similar and for the DUP to make comparisons in terms of the rural and urban split, one could argue then that Aghagallon and Derrytrasna you would have a totally different reconfiguration because it really doesn’t stack up. Because Loughside, as you know, was very much wards and DEAs that actually swept along the southern shores of Lough Neagh.

So I think the Commissioner in looking at the populations of the different villages around the Lough shores has made his best endeavours in relation to these particular areas and recognised from the outset that the new council of Craigavon, Armagh and Banbridge was not going to make the same urban and rural split that would have been so much easier in other configurations elsewhere for other councils.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you. Are there any further comments or questions on that issue? You mentioned that there were a few other matters that you wanted to raise, Mr Curran.

Brendan Curran: Just a very brief response to the UUPs submission and a brief response to Thomas O’Hanlon’s submission. It is our view that the UUP submission, while we don’t disagree that it has merit in terms of the figures, it is an argument that should have been made at the ward formation stage and has no relevance to the formation of DEAs. It’s interesting that there is no mention made of the DEA which is the large ratio elector to elected ratio and that’s Lurgan, which would actually require two additional councillors.

Lurgan DEA would require two additional councillors to bring the ratio to within the same bounds as that suggested for the other wards. This is a consideration for a future boundary commission and we believe it to be outside the remit of the current consultation but it probably should be looked at in the future and we certainly wouldn’t be adverse to that.

In relation to Mr O’Hanlon’s submission, it’s somewhat similar. He had asked for a section of the Seagahan Ward to be moved into Keady. I was slightly at loss but a glance at the map of the new council area shows the town of Keady to be contained within
the Keady ward and - I don't know if we can see it on the map - but you can see where it actually goes right round the town of Keady.

There are a few new developments which are outside of the town and wouldn't even really be within walking distance of the town, which are within Seagahan. We are not disputing that they maybe should have been contained within the same area as Keady but again it is not something that can be discussed at this time. It was an issue for the ward stage and it really doesn't come under the remit of this consultation.

Sarah Havlin: Although I think is it not the case that Mr O'Hanlon made?

Brendan Curran: He has not asked for Seagahan to be moved. He wants the Annvale Road to be used as the boundary definition.

Sarah Havlin: Yes, he does mention some difficulties with the ward boundaries but I thought perhaps he was suggesting that by moving one ward that that would rectify the difficulties so that the area was all going into the one DEA. Was that not the essence of the argument that he made?

Brendan Curran: Well if it is, I missed it because my reading would appear to be that he talks about actually shifting the Annvale Road and using the Annvale Road as a boundary as opposed to shifting the entire Seagahan ward.

Sarah Havlin: Yes, I think he's saying if you move the Seagahan ward then all of the area would go into the same DEA, but you're saying that that's not something you would agree with because?

Brendan Curran: It leads to a redrawing of the entire area and in relation to those built-up areas which are in the outskirts of Keady town then they should have been made at the ward stage.

Sarah Havlin: Yes, thank you for that. Yes, a speaker on the floor.

DK: Dolores Kelly, SDLP MLA. An apology from Mr O'Hanlon this morning, he's been unable to attend due to work commitments but I would like to confirm that your interpretation, Assistant Commissioner, of his submission is the correct interpretation and I would want to endorse that.
Sarah Havlin: Thank you. Are there any further comments or questions for this speaker? Is there anything further you would like to add, Mr Curran, at this point? Thank you very much indeed. Do we have any further speakers? Anyone else who may have joined the room who would like to speak at this stage because if we don’t have any further speakers at this point I would propose to adjourn. We do have some speakers coming this afternoon and the enquiry will remain open until 5pm today.

It’s just after 11.30am now so I would propose to adjourn until we have some more speakers who are due this afternoon and the enquiry would sit again at 1.30pm. Thank you very much indeed. Sorry, there’s a question.

Unidentified: Could I ask who is due to speak this afternoon, Commissioner?

Sarah Havlin: I think we only have one speaker this afternoon and that’s Arnold Hatch and I believe that’s the UUP.

JH: I would like to speak this afternoon too, Cllr John Hanna, Banbridge.

Sarah Havlin: Cllr John Hanna from Banbridge, you’d like to speak this afternoon. Could you make sure that you register your details with Jane, please?

JH: I have already.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you very much indeed.

Well if there’s nothing further from anyone I would propose to adjourn and sit again at 1.30pm this afternoon, thank you very much indeed everyone. Thank you.

Sarah Havlin: It is now 1.40pm and I now formally reopen this public inquiry into the proposed District Electoral Areas for the local government district of Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon. I understand that we have no further speakers registered to speak until 2pm this afternoon and so I am adjourning this public inquiry until 2pm. Thank you.
Ok. It's now 2pm and I am formally reopening the inquiry from our adjourned proceedings earlier. I'm going to move straight to calling our first speaker this afternoon, Cllr John Hannah. Cllr Hannah, over to you.

John Hannah: Thank you very much; thank you for the opportunity to make some representation. Now, the first point I want to make is that the Commissioner was appointed late on and had a very short time frame in which to come up with a plan. I know there's been a lot of research and background work done but, having said that, anything rushed leaves problems and leaves difficulties.

Also I would say the frame and structure behind it was flawed, in a sense, so that when I speak about Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon that the greater seems to have looked in terms of the number of constituents in the wards that reflect Belfast rather than reflecting Fermanagh and Omagh, for example. Or the Causeway or Antrim and Newtownabbey, which all would be more representative of what Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon are in terms of a rural settlement with obviously nuggets of higher population such as Armagh, Craigavon and Banbridge with smaller numbers of residents.

As you know from the figures that are before you, Fermanagh, Omagh have 2,227 per ward, whereas Banbridge have 3,397. Causeway has 2,399 and Antrim, Newtownabbey has 2,344. So you can see that actually Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon have on average two-thirds more than Fermanagh, Omagh; there are two-thirds more constituents in that area per ward in Banbridge, Armagh and Craigavon than there are in Fermanagh and Omagh and half as many in the other two that I mentioned.

Sarah Havlin: Yes, these are submissions in relation to those issues.

John Hannah: That's in relation to the Ulster Unionists and the point that was made in terms of that there should be more than forty one wards.

Sarah Havlin: I see that point and it has been made by others, although it isn't something that I'm able to look at under this process, so I just want to make that clear.

John Hannah: That's been a remiss but I would want to strongly make that point and it means underrepresentation and therefore an attack on our basic rights and basic democracy. And I would also quote the
example of where Banbridge has been twinned with Ruelle in France. I'm aware that even the smallest villages have their own councils and we're talking about trying to improve democracy and instead of that we're moving it into higher echelons and moving it away from the community.

And again I know it's not within your remit, but the community planning section hasn't really been given thorough consideration yet but I understand that's outside your remit but it's only an example of again where the ordinary citizen is being disadvantaged. Now that's not through the fault of the Commission, it's through the framework and that's what I'm saying, that whole framework needs to be looked at.

As far as this whole public administration was sold to us as being a new concept, a new opportunity in terms of saving money on economic terms, although that's a debatable argument that everyone would have fair representation. There are problems with that in terms of social inclusion and social cohesion when you look at the boundaries as they are presently drawn and to me the biggest one is, back to that Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, the underrepresentation with forty one councillors, the fact that it was even forty shows that there was a weakness there, in that there is an argument for forty for all the other councils and sixty for Belfast.

Sixty in Belfast is easy because you've only to walk round a few streets and you've done your election campaign, whereas in a rural area you can be travelling from one end of the country to the other within the whole region; it's a vast dispersed population and I don't think that has been given adequate consideration. I think it must be for fairness and equity and to be seen to be representing the people. Now how that's addressed, I'm not sure what the Commissioner can do in regards to that; it's maybe too late in the day. But again, that's back to the business of the whole boundaries process being too rushed.

Now again I want to now deal with individual areas and the first one that I want to point out is the boundary between Gransha and Rathfriland, Katesbridge, the line goes through the middle of Katesbridge. Now, how silly is that to put a boundary through the middle of a settlement?

Sarah Havlin: The ward boundary goes through Katesbridge, isn't that right?
John Hannah: Yes, you can see it on the map there.

Sarah Havlin: And you do understand I can't deal with the ward boundaries as part of this process because those are settled already under the 2012 Local Government Boundaries Act. I appreciate that there are strong feelings about ward boundaries even at this point.

John Hannah: Well, that part of that argument, the ward boundary isn't so significant if Gransha is in along with Rathfriland and in along with Loughbrickland and Banbridge like the individual constituent. Whether they vote in Katesbridge or they vote in Waringsford or whatever isn't the big issue; the issue is that if you move Gransha into Dromore and Quilly then you're separating Rathfriland from its natural hinterland from Katesbridge in that area and the people from Katesbridge and that area would tend towards Rathfriland and Banbridge. Katesbridge is very much associated with Banbridge in terms of the Corbet Lough and fishing and various other activities.

And also then when you look at the churches and the schools, again if they're taken outside that electoral area it will have a significant impact on the long term, on people's aspirations where they're focusing their community on.

Sarah Havlin: So your point is that Gransha should be in the Banbridge DEA and that's where it's been suggested under the current provisional recommendations.

John Hannah: Yes, I'm supporting that. Thank you for clarifying that, that's exactly what I'm saying; I'm supporting that on that basis of the social inclusion and again the cohesion with it.

Now, the other thing that I would have thought to encourage, as I said earlier about this whole concept of a new opportunity and to try and get councillors and the community out of their bunkers, I thought there should have been some cross-fertilisation, if I may put it that way, across Armagh and Banbridge and Banbridge and Craigavon and Armagh and Craigavon. And one of the things that I thought was amazing was that Tandragee and Loughbrickland were not integrated, and Markethill, because, Tandragee, in historic terms, always looked to Banbridge.
The Tandragee Urban Council was part of Banbridge district in the services of water and sewage and so on; it still is, in fact, in terms of services. So excluding Tandragee, there was the opportunity to create that, to mix things up a bit, so that people weren't in their old little pockets, if you like, that they were forced to take a broader view and to look at the whole ABC representing a wider reach than what it originally had been.

Sarah Havlin: So are you disagreeing with the Commissioner's proposals in relation to that area?

John Hannah: Yes, I would have liked to have seen Tandragee and Markethill included along with Loughbrickland.

Sarah Havlin: Tandragee Ward and Markethill Ward included with?

John Hannah: Loughbrickland, that Banbridge area, like how it's divided up.

Sarah Havlin: Obviously if I'm going to agree with you I have to be sure that I've looked at it fully. So if I were to agree with you and move Markethill and Tandragee from what's suggested as the Cusher DEA, that would leave Cusher with three wards; Cusher DEA would be left with three wards of Hamiltonsbawn, Rich Hill and Seagahan, is that right?

John Hannah: Yes.

Sarah Havlin: Banbridge would have nine, I think, if we brought those two in. So the statutory consideration, obviously the Commissioner isn't able to interfere with the law and the law does state there can be a minimum of five wards and a maximum of seven so that configuration would breach the statute.

John Hannah: Well it's just a point; I think it's a missed opportunity is the point I'm making. It's a missed opportunity in conjunction with the argument I made earlier that our wards are much too large and underrepresented in terms of the number of councillors. My argument would be that it should be about forty five wards rather than forty one. So that would tie in with that and that's the point I'm making that strengthens that argument.

Sarah Havlin: Yes, thank you.
John Hannah: Now, the other point is that I've represented Gilford and Lawrencetown which now Gilford is called the Gilford ward but it was two wards. It comes right into the edge of Scarva, believe it or not, to Drumiller Lane, and the people all round that area attend my church and they attend the Scarva Primary School and they would look towards Scarva and Banbridge very much so.

Sarah Havlin: That's the people of Lawrencetown?

John Hannah: Of that area.

Sarah Havlin: Of the whole of Gilford?

John Hannah: Well, not the whole of the area. In the past, Gilford would. I don't like what has happened and I enjoyed my time representing Gilford and Lawrencetown but I can see the logic of how it has to go in along with Lagan River to complete that circle. So I'm not disagreeing with what's said.

Sarah Havlin: You're not objecting with that.

John Hannah: I'm not entirely happy with the boundaries where they are and you're saying you can't do anything about the boundaries but I would say that I would hope that those boundaries would be looked at in the future; they're far from satisfactory and I think probably we missed an opportunity there to say something about that. My personal excuse is I was ill at the time and therefore didn't get making to it and I think we all missed a trick there in not doing something about it but I want it noted.

Sarah Havlin: Just to be clear just so I can understand, I appreciate that you do have reservations of the process in terms of fixing the wards and the ward boundaries and the number of wards and looking at the number of electors and that kind of thing, but in terms of the proposals here about grouping the wards, in relation to the ward of Gilford?

John Hannah: Reluctantly I have to accept that.

Sarah Havlin: You're reluctantly accepting it.

John Hannah: There's logic to that. I don't like it.

Sarah Havlin: But you're not making a formal objection.
John Hannah: I don't like it in terms of where I'm represented and I'm losing that and Banbridge Council put £2.4M into a new leisure centre in Gilford and that's moving out of the Gilford district but it's included in the overall ABC. So reluctantly I agree with that and accept it.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you.

John Hannah: And I think those are the main points I wanted to make in terms of that, yes. I just thank you for the opportunity. Overall, I think it was a good job under very rushed circumstances but again I would implore that we look at the number of wards in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon. I think it's unjust and unfair; it would contradict the whole concept of cohesion and inclusion and the European concept of enhancing democracy.

Sarah Havlin: But notwithstanding those reservations, you're here to support broadly the proposals as they stand in this district.

John Hannah: Yes.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you very much for clarifying that; thank you, Mr Hannah. Would anyone have any questions or anything they would like to say in response to that on the floor? No. Thank you very much; thank you, Mr Hannah; that was very helpful.

John Hannah: Thank you for the opportunity.

Sarah Havlin: Anyone else in the room who has registered to speak or needs to register to speak? No. I will adjourn the proceedings at this stage and sit again at 2.30pm for our next speaker who is Arnold Hatch. Arnold Hatch will be here at 2.30pm so I will sit again at 2.30pm, thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm now going to reopen the proceedings after our adjournment. We have one speaker registered this afternoon who now wishes to speak and that is Cllr Arnold Hatch of Craigavon, is that right? Cllr Hatch, could I ask you to come forward to the table at the front please and before you begin your submission if you'd just confirm your name and who you are representing, please?
Arnold Hatch: Thank you very much. My name is Cllr Arnold Hatch. I represent Craigavon Borough Council but I'm here on a follow-up to our party, the Ulster Unionist Party submission to the DEA Commissioner which, as far as we're concerned in the Craigavon, Armagh and Banbridge Council, we're at a serious disadvantage councillor-wise in that the average for our area is 3,397 per elected member, which is very close to Belfast. Belfast is a much smaller area; it's a city.

We are a conglomeration of three, nearly four mainly market towns and very widely spread out so it will be more difficult to provide a proper representation service to the people in this area compared to other areas. You just look at most of the others in and around the 2,200 from 2,000 to 2,700, we're 3,400 so we're at a serious disadvantage and definitely I think there should be discretion given to increase the number of wards in the areas.

Sarah Havlin: I'm afraid that the Commissioner does not have the power to look at that issue and I don't have the power to look at that issue, although I have heard that argument made here today. I appreciate you echoing your support of that but I do need to make it clear that it's not something that I have the authority to look at as part of this process.

Arnold Hatch: Yes, I understand that but I think it's worth noting the fact that it should be fed back to the powers that be, that it should be more democratic and it's not. So that's my submission to you today in terms of the proposals. I have no comment to make at the moment.

Sarah Havlin: No comment to make on the actual DEA proposals themselves? Do you wish to record any support or objection to any of the proposals?

Arnold Hatch: No, I understand there were proposals or submissions made in terms of the names of some of the DEAs but I have no comment to make on that.

Sarah Havlin: Thank you very much indeed. Are there any further comments or questions at this point? If there is no one else in the room who wishes to speak at this stage I am going to adjourn the proceedings. We are open as an inquiry until 5pm so we will be here and if anyone should wish to register to speak or arrive and wish to register to speak then we will facilitate that and the inquiry
will close at 5pm. Does anyone have any questions at this stage before I adjourn? Yes. I need that on the record.

CB:

Cllr Carol Black, Banbridge District Council. Could I as a point of information ask when you report, how long you’ve got and how we will get representation around that?

Sarah Havlin:
The report will be submitted to the Commissioner within four weeks of today’s date. The Commissioner will be considering the recommendations in my report and then he will make his final recommendations. I don't make the decision in respect of that; it's a recommendation that goes to the Commissioner and then he will communicate his final recommendations.

Now my report and the transcript of this hearing will be available on the website of the District Electoral Areas Commission and I believe you can also request written copies of the transcript. Those will not be published until the final report from the Commissioner is ready but I believe that is November time; it will be before the end of the year.

CB:

Before December, January?

Sarah Havlin:
I can't answer that at this stage; I believe the timetable is to be by December

CB:

Thank you.

Sarah Havlin:
If there's nothing else?

BC:

Brendan Curran, Sinn Fein. It's just following your comments when you spoke earlier, I reread a submission from Cllr O'Hanlon regarding the Seagahan DEA areas. Although in my initial reading I believed that he was requesting Seagahan ward to be shifted, on rereading it I am more convinced now than ever, in fact I would refer ....

Sarah Havlin:
Can you give me just one moment until I get that submission in front of me? Yes, go ahead.

BC:

I would refer you to six lines from the bottom "I request that the Commissioner and Commission look again at this anomaly and shift the line which splits the Armagh and Cusher DS to the
Armagh, Banbridge Craigavon EDITED Transcript

Sarah Havlin: Yes, he says in his letter "I would request that the Commissioner and the Commission look again at this anomaly" and by that you think he is referring to the anomaly of the ward boundary and not the DEA boundary?

BC: Yes, because he distinctly says shift and shift the line which splits the Armagh and Cusher DS to the Annvale Road. He's not actually for the ward to be shifted, he's asking for the boundary of the ward to be shifted, in which case it's outside the remit and this is what confused me slightly. My own reading initially was that it was a change to the Seagahan, to the DEA by shifting the ward but on reflection, it's not.

Sarah Havlin: Yes, Mr Curran, so I will record that you have objected to Mr O'Hanlon's proposal and also that you believe that the terms in which it has been framed fall outside the parameters of this process because it relates to the ward boundary change and not to the DEA change specifically. Yes, thank you. Is there anything further? No, thank you very much everyone; I'm going to adjourn and we will be here if anyone else chooses to speak between now and 5pm. We will close at 5pm. Thank you.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Sarah Havlin: It is now 5pm and I am formally bringing this inquiry to a close. Earlier in the proceedings when I adjourned the inquiry at 2.37pm I confirmed that there is no one else who indicated that they wish to speak. Participants were advised that once I have closed the inquiry I cannot receive any further evidence. At that stage the participants present had confirmed that they had the opportunity to fully air and present their submission. All participants have now left the inquiry and no further people have presented themselves to this inquiry since the time of the last adjournment, thus I propose to bring the hearing to a close.

Before I formally close these proceedings I would like to place on record my gratitude to everyone who has attended, particularly those who have made representations. I want to thank the support team from the office of the District Electoral Areas Commissioner, Land and Property Services, Morrow Communications and the transcribers and audio engineers for
the help they have given me in preparing for and conducting this hearing. I would also like to record our thanks to the management and staff of this hotel for the excellent facilities that they have provided.

My immediate task now is to consider carefully all of the evidence I have heard at the inquiry, as well as the written representations that were received during the recent consultation period and to prepare a report for the District Electoral Areas Commissioner within the next four weeks. My report will be made publicly available on the Commission website, together with the Commissioner's final recommendations report. It will ultimately be a matter for the Commissioner to decide whether to accept any or all of my recommendations.

I wish to record my formal thanks to all participants for their assistance and I declare this public inquiry to be closed.