

Secretary,
Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee No. 1,
Room 1.67,
Custom House,
Dublin 1
D01 W6XO

16th February 2018
PG/ms

By post and email to boundarycommittee@housing.gov.ie

Re: Review of Local Electoral Areas (LEAs) in County Westmeath

A Chara,

This submission is made in response to your letter dated 17/1/2018 inviting submissions on behalf of the above Committee. I make it from a management and operational perspective, without prejudice to any submissions that may be made by the elected members of Westmeath County Council individually or collectively.

County Westmeath is currently divided for local electoral purposes into 3 LEAs, which are arranged into 2 Municipal Districts (MDs) configured with the 2 largest towns in the County (Mullingar and Athlone) as follows:

MDs	No. of Cllrs	LEAs	No. of Cllrs
Mullingar	13	Mullingar-Coole	7
		Mullingar-Kilbeggan	6
Athlone	7	Athlone	7
Total	20		20

The operational services of the Council are similarly configured, having been reviewed and reorganised from efficiency and effectiveness perspectives in 2014, in association with the establishment of the above Municipal Districts (and the demise of Athlone and Mullingar Town Councils) under the provisions of the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

Council staff are deployed to central/county functions (in Mullingar and Athlone), or to MD functions (in Athlone for Athlone MD, and Mullingar/Castlepollard for Mullingar MD). Operationally this arrangement has been working well, with staff serving the MDs based within the MD delivering services to the public and supporting the elected MD members in their work. The Council has shown that it can successfully combine LEAs within a single MD to operate effectively.

A major change to the current MDs would require consequential changes to the deployment of Council functions and personnel, in order to continue to provide the current level of service at MD level. The capacity of the Council to undertake this so soon after implementing the 2014 structural reforms is a relevant consideration while it is currently focused on other priorities such as housing delivery and economic development. In that regard, I am pleased to note article 7(ii) of the Committee's terms of reference [which in the case of Westmeath is not subject to article 7(i)].

The review may also be assisted by taking account of the county settlement hierarchy as provided for in the Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020 as set out in the attached table (with Census 2016 population for each settlement).

With regard to article 4 of the Committee's terms of reference (re. towns of population \geq 15,000), I suggest that consideration of its implementation in County Westmeath should take account of the overall balance of urban/rural population in the County, within the context of no change in the current total membership of the elected Council of 20 members (as per article 2 of the terms of reference). Census 2016 indicated that within a total county population of 88,770, this balance is 49% urban and 51% rural (with 'urban' being towns \geq 1,500 population, see attached table). The bulk of the urban population is made up of the population of the towns of Athlone and Mullingar. Each exceeds the threshold of 15,000 in article 2, and between them represent approx. 44% of the county's population.

Should you require any further information or clarification to assist your Committee in its work, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,


Pat Gallagher,
Chief Executive

Designated Public Official under the Regulation of Lobbying Act

Settlement Hierarchy	2011 - Population (Number)	2016 - Population (Number)	Actual change since previous census (Number)	Percentage change since previous census (%)
Tier 1 Gateway Towns				
Athlone	20153	21349	1196	5.9
Mullingar	20103	20928	825	4.1
Key Service Town				
Castlepollard	1042	1163	121	11.6
Service Town				
Moate	2731	2763	32	1.2
Kilbeggan	1199	1288	89	7.4
Kinnegad	2662	2745	83	3.1
Local Service Town				
Rochfortbridge	1494	1473	-21	-1.4
Killucan-Rathwire	1226	1370	144	11.7
Clonmellon	634	664	30	4.7
Tyrrellspass	506	483	-23	-4.5
Rural Centres				
Delvin	697	740	43	6.2
Multyfarnham	376	420	44	11.7
Ballymore*	433	483	50	11.5
Ballynacarrigy	287	277	-10	-3.5
Raharney	227	221	-6	-2.6
Collinstown	336	356	20	6.0
Glassan	198	207	9	4.5
Castletown Geoghegan	150	141	-9	-6.0
Ballinalack/Lackan*	681	600	-81	-11.9
Rathowen*	318	363	45	14.2
Finnea*	272	265	-7	-2.6
Ballynagore*	533	528	-5	-0.9
Coole*	253	238	-15	-5.9
Milltownpass*	300	300	0	0.0

* Relates to population of the ED