

Submission on Dublin Fingal constituency to Boundary review

On behalf of the constituency officer board of Fine Gael,
Dublin Fingal

Summary

The key local requirements for any boundary revision in Fingal are to preserve the integrity of the county town of Swords, and to support the economic integration of the four north coastal town, Rusk, Lusk, Skerries and Balbriggan. Achieving the second goal is easy enough, placing all four town, and their hinterlands of Holmpatirck and Balbriggan Rural in one LEA. Achieving the first goal, within the constraints of the DED boundaries, is not possible.

We advise, strongly, that a new Swords LEA be set up to cover the built-up area of Swords. Unless this is done, the future development of the capital of Fingal, now the fastest growing area in the State, will be put at risk. To so this, we advise the use of the Census 2016 small areas, rather than the 130 year old District Electoral Divisions as the base.

Background

The Fingal area has grown rapidly since the 2011 Census, which was the basis for the current LEA boundaries. Most LEAs, including Balbriggan, Howth-Malahide and Mulhuddart, have 8 seats, and there is one 9 seater LEA – Swords.

LEA	Population	Seats	Variance
Balbriggan	61845	8	4.3%
Castleknock	50148	7	-3.3%
Howth-Malahide	59794	8	1.0%
Mulhuddart	59747	8	0.9%
Swords	64486	9	-3.3%
Total	296020	40	

The current situation is shown in Map 1.



Map 1: Current LEA and DED boundaries in Fingal

Requirements

The statutory process of boundary revision is intended to achieve a set of boundaries that meets the following requirements :-

- Between 5 and 7 seats per LEA
- Fair distribution of representation - less than 10% variance between LEAs
- Built up from existing district electoral divisions, to the extent possible.

Local needs

Our intent is to apply this process to the Fingal region, meeting some additional criteria :-

- Preserving the integrity of our capital town – Swords.
- Reflecting local patterns of activity and the flow of business

We believe that it is imperative to avoid the division of the rapidly growing town of Swords, as this will harm its future development.

We also believe that the Four Towns area, Rush, Lusk, Skerries, and Balbriggan form one economic unit for many purposes, partly because of the deep inlet separating the Lusk area, from the Donabate area.

In the same way, the Donabate-Portrane peninsula is separated from Malahide by a deep inlet, and its natural hinterland is the county town of Swords, and not Lusk, nor Malahide. This explains why the Donabate and Portrane area has been part of the Swords LEA for many years.

Implications

To meet the required number of seats in each LEA, while retaining a total of 40 seats, at least one extra LEA is essential. This immediately poses some challenges. Fingal is an area that has undergone very rapid growth over the last decade, and is predicted to grow further again over the next decade. Given this rapid growth, the current DED boundaries do not match the reality of the lives of people in the county. This poses a major challenge for democratic representation in the local authority. It is very difficult to draw up boundaries that respect the needs of local communities.

One big challenge here is that the population of Swords ‘proper’ is now so high that it cannot fairly be represented by 7 councillors. The natural boundaries of Swords are the M1 on one side, and the edges of the built-up areas to North, West and East. The DED boundaries extend substantially beyond this, and include a significant population in many smaller settlements. We have spent much time, effort, and computation, in trying to address this. In our considered view, there is no satisfactory solution.

One feature that does emerge from all our work is that the Coastal DEDs, from Lusk to Balbriggan, including Holmpatrick, and Balbriggan Rural (where most of the population of Balbriggan live) forms a natural and viable unit, with 7 seats. We would urge that this be adopted.

Following discussion with colleagues in Dublin West, we support their suggestion to adjust the balance between Mulhuddart and Castleknock, by the transfer of one DED, Blanchardstown-Corduff, from Mulhuddart to Castleknock.

For the Swords area, we examined several possible options, using the existing DED boundaries, in detail. We found all of them to be unsatisfactory. For example, one might suggest a new largely rural LEA encircling Swords, consisting of mostly rural DED's, running from Dubber and The Ward, up to Balscadden, and leaving the core of Swords, and Donabate-Portrane in the Swords LEA. This would leave out a sizeable number of people living in recently developed parts of Kilsallaghan and Dubber. Another, which we would also strongly oppose, was to split Swords into two LEAs, divided roughly North and South. None of the options we looked at was in any way satisfactory, given the importance of Swords as the capital of Fingal, and we do not recommend them.

Many of these proposals have the distinct further disadvantage that people living in Mulhuddart, but in the newly built-up fringes, which lie in The Ward, would be included in an otherwise largely rural LEA. Again, we do not recommend that.

Our work says more about the limits of the process we are required to use, than the merits of any particular boundary. We would urge those deciding on the boundaries, not to be constrained by DED divisions in their decision making. We note that there is already precedent for this, in that the current Swords LEA has about 350 people living in Swords-Seatown, but on the west side of the M1 motorway included. The remainder of this LEA is the Howth-Malahide ward.

Conclusions

We will strongly oppose any proposal that splits the town of Swords. We strongly urge that the four Northern towns (Rusk, Lusk, Skerries, and Balbriggan) be kept together. We advise that a more detailed, more local analysis of boundaries should be carried out, based, not on the 130 year old DED system, but on the new census small area system, which was designed for this purpose.

Appendix 1

This is the current LEA distribution. 364 people from Swords-Seatown DED are assigned to Howth-Malahide.

LEA	DED	Total population (2016)
Balbriggan	Balbriggan Rural	16495
Balbriggan	Rush	9921
Balbriggan	Lusk	9623
Balbriggan	Skerries	8501
Balbriggan	Balbriggan Urban	8116
Balbriggan	Holmpatrick	3458
Balbriggan	Garristown	1628
Balbriggan	Hollywood	1397
Balbriggan	Ballyboghil	1162
Balbriggan	Clonmethan	837
Balbriggan	Balscadden	707
Blanchardstown-Castleknock	Castleknock-Knockmaroon	19027
Blanchardstown-Castleknock	Blanchardstown-Coolmine	11320
Blanchardstown-Castleknock	Blanchardstown-Abbotstown	6195
Blanchardstown-Castleknock	Castleknock-Park	5329
Blanchardstown-Castleknock	Blanchardstown-Delwood	5153
Blanchardstown-Castleknock	Blanchardstown-Roselawn	1688
Blanchardstown-Castleknock	Lucan North	1436
Howth-Malahide	Kinsaley	9621
Howth-Malahide	Howth	8294
Howth-Malahide	Baldoyle	7524
Howth-Malahide	Malahide East	7429
Howth-Malahide	Swords-Seatown	7003
Howth-Malahide	Malahide West	6149
Howth-Malahide	Sutton	5680
Howth-Malahide	Portmarnock North	4109
Howth-Malahide	Portmarnock South	3621
Howth-Malahide	Balgriffin	3113
Mulhuddart	Blanchardstown-Blakestown	38894
Mulhuddart	The Ward	9602
Mulhuddart	Blanchardstown-Mulhuddart	4123
Mulhuddart	Blanchardstown-Corduff	3871
Mulhuddart	Blanchardstown-Tyrrelstown	3257
Swords	Swords-Forrest	15153
Swords	Swords-Lissenhall	10447
Swords	Donabate	9399

Swords	Swords-Glasmore	7711
Swords	Dubber	7372
Swords	Airport	5018
Swords	Swords Village	2674
Swords	Kilsallaghan	2263
Swords	Turnapin	1700