

# Submission to Local Boundary Committee No.2

*Labour Dublin Bay South Submission on Local Electoral Boundaries in Dublin City Council Area*

## 1 Introduction

This submission is being made on behalf of the Dublin Bay South Labour Party. The key purpose of this submission is to impress upon the committee the need to observe those guidelines that will promote good local representation. This submission has been carefully considered and reflects the experience of Labour's elected representatives in the area – past and present.

This submission sets out first the key principles that we think Committee No.2 must apply to the Dublin Bay South area, and all areas for which it has responsibility. Secondly, the submission details the available options to the committee under two scenarios, depending on whether or not the existing Dáil Boundary is to continue to be used also as the Local Electoral Area boundary.

We also argue against certain outcomes that might appear plausible to the committee, but which would cause great harm.

We wish to emphasise also that these concerns are not borne out of partisan interest, but rather the interest of good local representation for urban towns and villages.

## 2 Dublin Bay South Analysis

With a recorded population of 121,796 at Census 2016, Dublin Bay South is due to be allocated 14 seats out of the 63 total on Dublin City Council. Alternatively, if the new Local Electoral Areas do not align with Dáil boundaries, we anticipate that the area could take in areas to the west, and accommodate 15 seats.

If the Dáil boundaries and local boundaries are to remain aligned, the Committee is forced under the terms of reference to designate two 7-seat Local Electoral Areas. The constituency is currently divided into *Rathgar – Rathmines* (6 seats) and *Pembroke – South Dock* (8 seats) Local Electoral Areas. In order to achieve two 7-seat LEAs, with equal population, a transfer of approximately 10,800 of population from *Pembroke – South Dock* to *Rathgar-Rathmines* is necessary.

If the Dáil boundaries and local boundaries are not to remain aligned, the Committee is free to consider a range of options for the makeup of Local Electoral Areas. We would recommend that three 5-seater Local Electoral Areas be designated by the committee in this instance. This would require a transfer of approximately 11,700 of population from the *Crumlin – Kimmage* Local Electoral Area, into the DBS area.

### 3 Treatment of Urban Towns and Villages

We implore the committee to ensure that each of our urban towns and villages are wholly within a single Local Electoral Area, and are not divided between separate LEAs.

This is an aim contained within item 4 of the terms of reference for the Boundary Committee. We believe this to be integral to the proper functioning of local representation, in particular the issue of urban towns and villages. Item 4 reads as follows:

*"Local electoral areas should be designed, as far as possible, around urban villages or have a neighbourhood focal point (or points), taking due account of local and community identities and linkages and the need to facilitate the effectiveness of the governance and representational roles of elected members, including, in particular, the need to avoid designating local electoral areas which are territorially very large or extend over very long distances or over multiple urban villages, or which divide individual urban villages or natural communities."*

The key requirements in the context of Dublin City are not to divide 'urban villages or natural communities'.

Dublin Bay South contains a number of areas that have been threatened with, or have experienced, division by boundary reviews in recent memory. Terenure and Sandymount were high profile examples when, in 2009, they were each split virtually in two. It is integral to the democratic process that such social and economic centres are afforded dedicated local representation and are not divided. Indeed, the terms of reference acknowledge that the effect of dividing a community for electoral purposes is not merely aesthetic, but actually impacts on the ability of that community, and its representatives, to work in its best interests.

We respectfully submit that the following towns and villages should be protected by the Boundary Committee, as per its terms of reference:

Ballsbridge  
Donnybrook  
Harold's Cross  
Merrion  
Portobello  
Rathgar  
Rathmines  
Ringsend  
Sandymount  
Terenure

We note also that at the time of writing, that this is the number one issue raised in submissions to the Boundary Committee, including a submission by Dublin City Council itself.

## 4 Alignment with Dáil Boundaries

We would implore the committee to carefully consider the desirability of the Dáil boundary and local boundaries being aligned in the south of Dublin City. We note the wording of item 5 in the Terms of Reference:

*"The committee should take account of the desirability, where it may be possible to do so, of aligning local electoral area boundaries with Dáil constituency boundaries."*

One reason that the committee may have for varying from the Dáil boundary is to create a single Inner City Local Electoral Area for the south-side. It was the practice until the last review, that the south inner city was represented by two Local Electoral Areas.

We trust the Boundary Committee will carefully consider the desirability, or otherwise, of aligning the Dáil and Local boundaries at this location.

## 5 The Case for Smaller Local Electoral Areas

With the addition of some electoral divisions from Dublin South-Central, the subject area of this submission could accommodate three 5-seat Local Electoral Areas. An obvious division of the area would be to use Rathmines, the Inner City, and the Sandymount area as bases for three new Local Electoral Areas.

One reason that the committee may wish to breach the Dáil boundary, is to demarcate a South Inner City Local Electoral Area

It has been the experience of our public representatives, that the job of a local councillor is made more difficult by larger LEAs. This is simply because one councillor can only realistically give adequate attention to a certain number of people. In a multi-seat constituency, all representatives are expected to (and do) represent all constituents, and therefore as constituencies increase in size, so does the workload; the quality of representation necessarily decreases.

We note that in Dublin the ratio of councillors per population is much higher than the national average, and so these challenges are magnified.

We therefore implore the committee to consider designating three 5-seater Local Electoral Areas in the south-east of the city, and recommend that they approach other areas of Dublin with the same consideration for the practicalities of local representation.

## 6 Proposal – Two 7-Seat LEAs

We are aware that under the terms of reference, it is quite likely that Dáil boundaries and local boundaries will align, and that Dublin Bay South will therefore be divided into two 7-seat Local Electoral Areas. This will require a transfer of population from *Pembroke – South Dock* to *Rathgar-Rathmines* of approximately 10,800.

### 6.1 Option 1 – A Divided Donnybrook (Not Recommended)

We believe there to be two options open to the committee in this regard. Option 1 would transfer *Rathmines East B* electoral division into *Rathgar – Rathmines*. This would split up the natural community of Donnybrook, and we would strongly urge against it. It would also create two very unbalanced Local Electoral Areas.

#### **Splitting Up the Natural Community of Donnybrook**

Donnybrook is divided between four electoral divisions. It is rather an odd reality of local government in Dublin that this community should, every 5 years, be subject to a process whereby it could be carved up in a multitude of ways. We recommend that it is kept together, in accordance with the terms of reference set down for the committee.

We would also use Donnybrook as one example of many which would justify a redrawing of the electoral division boundaries to protect the urban towns and villages of Dublin City from division.

#### **Unbalanced Electoral Areas**

This option would see the *Pembroke – South Dock* ward have a population 10,000 higher than *Rathgar-Rathmines*, and the two would elect an equal number of councillors. We believe this would be unjust. It is also unnecessary.

#### **Conclusion**

Option 1 would at first glance appear like an easy fix for the boundary committee. However, it would be unjust to divide Donnybrook to achieve such an easy fix. It would also be a poor solution from the perspective of equal representation, as the populations are so unbalanced.

Luckily, there is an alternative, and just as easy, solution in option 2. There is therefore no need to resort to splitting a natural community, or granting one area disproportionate representation against another. For these reasons, we recommend option 2 to the committee.

## 6.2 Option 2 – Transfer Portobello to Rathgar-Rathmines (Recommended)

Under Option 2, the St. Kevin's and Wood Quay B electoral divisions would be transferred from Pembroke – South Dock to Rathgar Rathmines. These two electoral divisions encompass the natural community of Portobello. Under this solution, the two Local Electoral Areas are closer in population than under option 1.

We are aware that the canal has traditionally been the boundary at local level in this area; however, this is the only area in which the Grand Canal still functions as a local electoral boundary. It can hardly be described as a natural boundary for electoral purposes either, since the many amenities of Rathmines are heavily used by Portobello residents from across the canal.

We strongly recommend this option to the committee, if the Dáil and local boundaries are to remain aligned. This option represents the responsible and most equitable course of action, creating two Local Electoral Areas almost equal in size, and avoiding the unnecessary splitting of any natural communities.

Figure 1: Option 1 - Not Recommended in this Submission

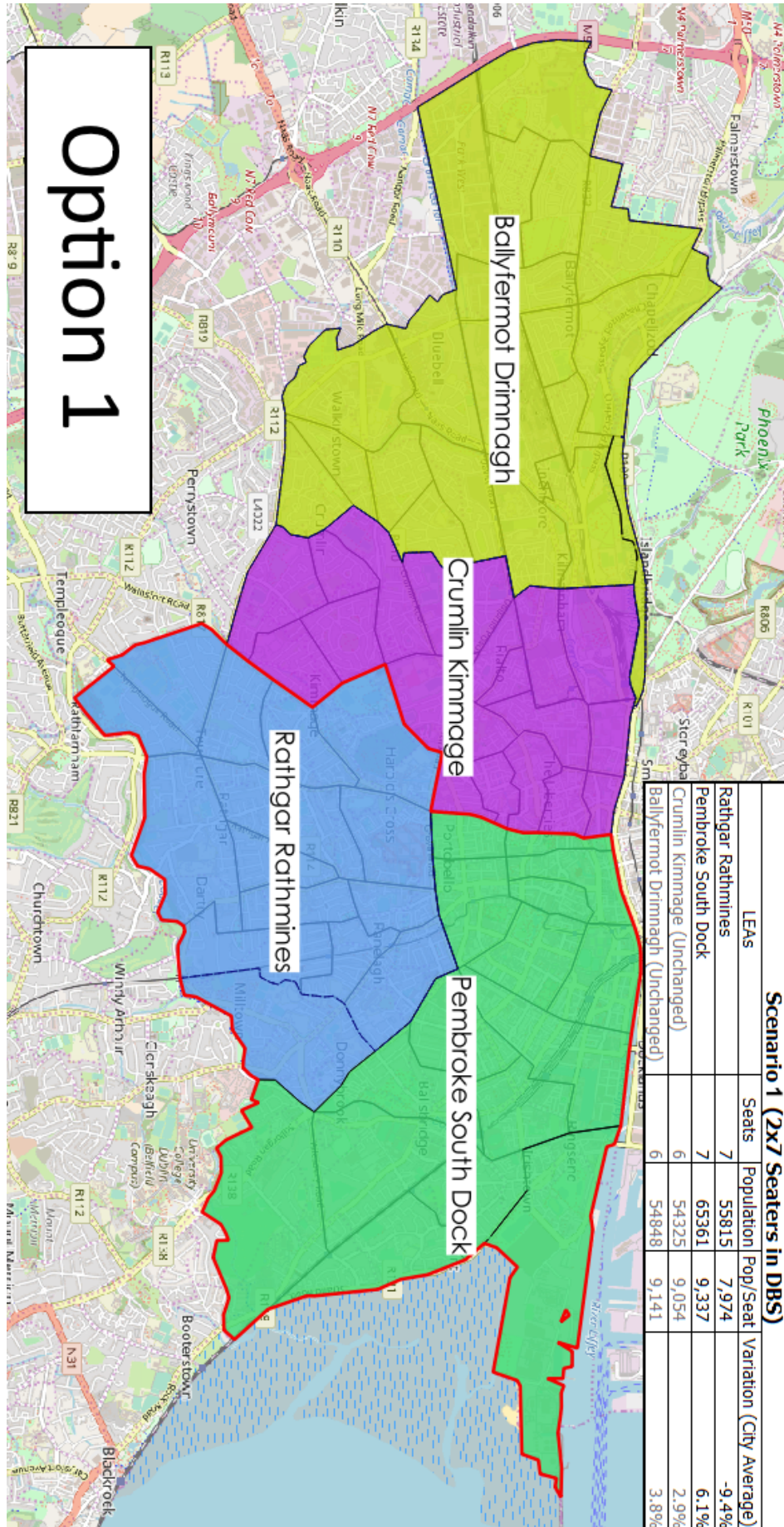
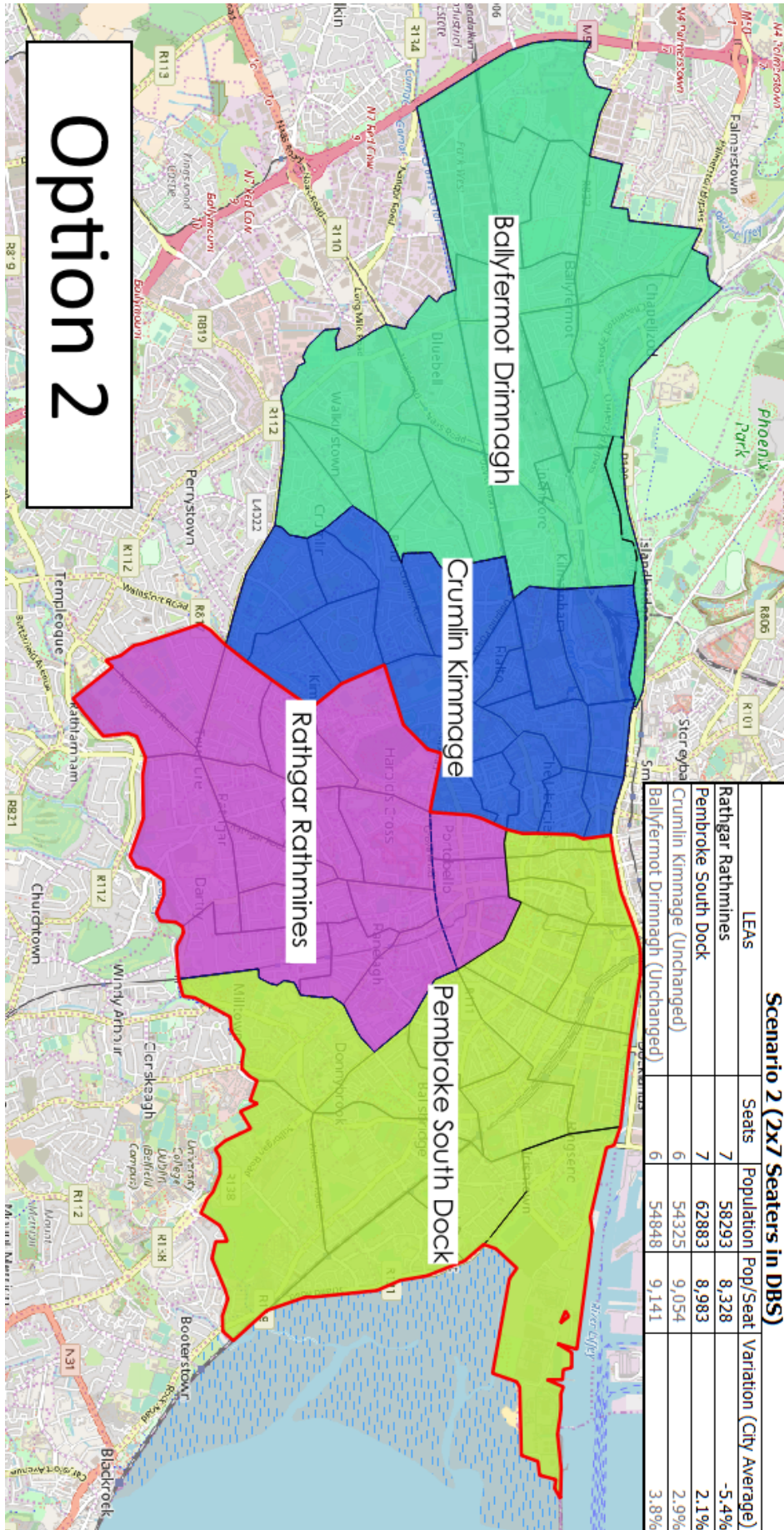


Figure 2: Option 2 - Recommended in this Submission



## 7 Conclusion

The Dublin Bay South Labour Party is strongly in favour of smaller Local Electoral Areas in Dublin City, due to the large ratio of population per councillor, and the experience that public representatives in the area have had in the last 4 years.

In the event, however, that the Dáil boundaries are aligned to the national Dáil boundaries, we have set out a clear preference, based in the protection of natural communities, as required in the terms of reference, and the principle of equal representation. We therefore recommend 'Option 2' to the committee, which would involve the transfer of Wood Quay B and St. Kevin's electoral divisions into Rathgar-Rathmines.

Colm Maguire

Chairperson

**Labour Dublin Bay South**