

Submission to Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees No. 2

16 February 2018

Secretary,
Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees 2017,
Room 1.67,
Custom House,
Dublin 1,
D01 W6X0.

Dear Secretary,

I write in relation to the invitation for public submissions on the issue of changes to the Local Electoral Areas currently in use in Fingal. As a preliminary matter, I would strongly question whether such changes are needed or wanted by any great number of Fingal voters. The current LEAs serve the community well, and for the most part are sensibly constituted.

The terms of reference which are proposed, and in particular the upward limit of 7 Councillors per LEA, will necessitate the carving up of existing LEAs against the express wishes of voters. It is a stated aim of the Minister's terms of reference to reduce the overall size of LEAs in order to make it easier for county councillors to represent their constituents – however while that may be a problem in rural counties, the LEAs in Fingal are significantly smaller geographically than the national average. In light of the above, the Committee would be well served by rejecting the terms of reference laid down by the Minister, and **recommending the retention of the Fingal LEAs in their current form.**

In the regrettable event that the Committee do not choose to recommend the retention of the LEAs as they are currently arranged, it will be necessary to make changes to each of the existing LEAs. In this regard I have a number of observations and representations to offer.

THE STATUS QUO

With a population of **296,020** and 40 County Councillors, the average level of representation across the constituency ought to be **one Councillor per 7,401** people. The terms of reference allow for variation of +/- 10% within the constituency. This translates as an upper limit of **one Councillor per 8,140** people and a lower limit of **one Councillor per 6,660** people. As things stand, the LEAs used for the purpose of elections to Fingal County Council are constituted as follows:

LEA Name	Number of Cllrs	Population	Population per Cllr	Variation from Average
Balbriggan	8	61,845	7,730	+4.3%
Swords	9	64,486	7,165	-3.3%
Howth - Malahide	8	59,794	7,474	+1%
Castleknock	7	50,148	7,164	-3.3%
Mulhuddart	8	59,747	7,468	+0.9%
TOTAL	40	296,020	N/A	N/A

As will be obvious from the above figures, the smallest possible population which it will be possible to arrange into a 5 seat LEA within the acceptable range of variation is 33,300. Similarly, the largest possible population which can be arranged to form a 7 seat LEA is 56,980. If the Minister's terms of reference are to be complied with, there will necessarily have to be shrinkage in four of the five existing LEAs.

DUBLIN WEST

The Castleknock and Mulhuddart LEAs have a natural degree of distinction from the remainder of Fingal, falling as they do within the Dublin West Dáil constituency rather than Dublin Fingal. As Mulhuddart is currently an 8 seat LEA, there will have to be some reduction in its size.

The possibility of reconfiguring the two LEAs into three 5 seat LEAs is made effectively impossible by the Blanchardstown-Blakestown Electoral Division. This ED alone has a population of 38,894, making any reconfiguration extremely difficult. The construction of three 5 seat LEAs may be aided by the transfer of the Dubber ED from Swords to Mulhuddart, however this has already arisen as an issue of serious contention to Swords residents and politicians. Taking into consideration point 5 of the terms of reference:

"5. 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."

It would seem desirable not to mix LEAs which fall in the Dublin West and Dublin Fingal constituencies. The solution therefore, which requires the least change and which preserves the integrity of Dáil constituency boundaries involves the transfer of the Blanchardstown-Corduff ED to the Castleknock LEA and the creation of two 7 seat LEAs. The two Dublin West LEAs would therefore be constituted of the following EDs:

CASTLEKNOCK – 7 Councillors

Electoral Division	Population	Population per Cllr	Variation from Average
Castleknock-Knockmaroon	19,027		
Castleknock-Park	5,329		
Lucan North	1,436		
Blanchardstown-Abbotstown	6,195		
Blanchardstown-Coolmine	11,320		
Blanchardstown-Roselawn	1,688		
Blanchardstown-Delwood	5,153		
Blanchardstown-Corduff	3,871		
TOTAL	54,019	7,717	+4.1%

MULHUDDART – 7 Councillors

Electoral Division	Population	Population per Cllr	Variation from Average
The Ward	9,602		
Blanchardstown-Tyrrelstown	3,257		
Blanchardstown-Mulhuddart	4,123		
Blanchardstown-Blakestown	38,894		
TOTAL	55,876	7,982	+7.3%

The remainder of this submission will consider the various ways in which the committee might address the LEAs in Dublin Fingal. Each of the recommendations which will be mentioned in that context are independent of my recommendation in relation to Dublin West, which has a straightforward and self-contained solution.

DUBLIN FINGAL

It is now necessary to consider the part of the constituency which falls within the Dublin Fingal Dáil boundary. Here there are a number of competing issues, which if the Committee is to comply with the Minister's terms of reference will necessitate radical change to one of two existing LEAs. The only area which appears suitable for the creation of a new LEA is the Rush-Lusk-Donabate area around the Malahide and Rogerstown Estuaries. This will require the transfer of various EDs from the existing Balbriggan, Swords, and possibly Howth-Malahide LEAs.

If the new LEA is to reach the critical mass necessary to be sustainable as an LEA under the terms of reference, it will have to encompass an area of at least 33,300 people. The Rush, Lusk, and Donabate EDs combined fall just shy of 29,000 people. In order to achieve the minimum size required, therefore, it will be necessary to add either the Swords-Lissenhall ED from the west or both Malahide EDs from across the estuary. The creation of the new LEA will therefore **significantly compromise the integrity of either the Swords or Howth-Malahide LEA.**

OPTION I – Creation of new “Rogerstown Estuary” LEA

The first option would see the transfer of the Donabate and Swords-Lissenhall EDs from the Swords LEA to the new “Rogerstown Estuary” LEA (name indicative only). This would also include the transfer of the Rush, Lusk, and Ballyboghil EDs from the Balbriggan LEA, which would accordingly be reduced from an 8 seat LEA to a 6 seat LEA. The portion of the Swords-Seatown ED east of the M1 should also be transferred to the Swords LEA. The new LEAs under Option I would be constituted as follows:

BALBRIGGAN – 6 Seats

Electoral Division	Population	Population per Cllr	Variation from Average
Balbriggan Urban	8,116		
Balbriggan Rural	16,495		
Balscadden	707		
Hollywood	1,397		
Garristown	1,628		
Holmpatrick	3,458		
Skerries	8,501		
Clonmethan	837		
TOTAL	41,139	6,857	-7.9%

SWORDS – 7 Seats

Electoral Division	Population	Population per Cllr	Variation from Average
Swords-Glasmore	7,711		
Swords-Forrest	15,153		
Swords Village	2,674		
Swords-Seatown	7,003		
Kilsallaghan	2,263		
Airport	5,018		
Turnapin	1,700		
Dubber	7,372		
TOTAL	48,894	6,985	-5.9%

HOWTH-MALAHIDE – 7 Seats

Electoral Division	Population	Population per Cllr	Variation from Average
Malahide West	6,149		
Malahide East	7,429		
Portmarnock North	4,109		
Portmarnock South	3,621		
Baldoyle	7,524		
Sutton	5,680		
Howth	8,294		
Kinsaley	9,621		
Balgriffin	3,113		
TOTAL	55,540	7,934	+6.7%

ROGERSTOWN – 6 Seats

Electoral Division	Population	Population per Cllr	Variation from Average
Rush	9,921		
Lusk	9,623		
Donabate	9,399		
Swords-Lissenhall	10,447		
Ballyboghil	1,162		
TOTAL	40,552	6,759	-9.5%

OPTION I – PROS AND CONS

Pros

- Requires minimum change to the Howth-Malahide LEA

Cons

- Requires the division of Swords, which has received significant local opposition. At the time of writing, a large majority of the submissions already received by the Committee oppose any division of Swords town and its natural hinterland.
- Swings the variation from the average level of representation to extremes. The new LEA would be extremely close to the maximum allowed variation.

OPTION II - Creation of new “Malahide Estuary” LEA

To avoid the division of Swords, and to create more balanced variation from the average level of representation within the changed LEAs, a new LEA may be created which encompasses the area adjoining the Rogerstown and Malahide estuaries. This would involve the transfer of the Rush, Lusk, and Ballyboghil EDs from Balbriggan, and the Donabate ED from Swords. Malahide West and Malahide East would be transferred from Howth-Malahide. The ED of Swords-Seatown would be transferred in its entirety. The new LEAs would be constituted thus:

BALBRIGGAN – 6 Seats

Electoral Division	Population	Population per Cllr	Variation from Average
Balbriggan Urban	8,116		
Balbriggan Rural	16,495		
Balscadden	707		
Hollywood	1,397		
Garristown	1,628		
Holmpatrick	3,458		
Skerries	8,501		
Clonmethan	837		
TOTAL	41,139	6,857	-7.9%

SWORDS – 7 Seats

Electoral Division	Population	Population per Cllr	Variation from Average
Swords-Lissenhall	10,447		
Swords-Glasmore	7,711		
Swords-Forrest	15,153		
Swords Village	2,674		
Kilsallaghan	2,263		
Airport	5,018		
Turnapin	1,700		
Dubber	7,372		
TOTAL	52,338	7,477	+1%

HOWTH-PORTMARNOCK – 6 Seats

Electoral Division	Population	Population per Cllr	Variation from Average
Portmarnock North	4,109		
Portmarnock South	3,621		
Baldoyle	7,524		
Sutton	5,680		
Howth	8,294		
Kinsaley	9,621		
Balgriffin	3,113		
TOTAL	41,962	6,994	-5.8%

MALAHIDE-ROGERSTOWN ESTUARY – 7 Seats

Electoral Division	Population	Population per Cllr	Variation from Average
Malahide West	6,149		
Malahide East	7,429		
Swords-Seatown	7,003		
Rush	9,921		
Lusk	9,623		
Donabate	9,399		
Ballyboghil	1,162		
TOTAL	50,686	7,241	-2.2%

OPTION II – PROS AND CONS

Pros

- Largely preserves the integrity of the existing Swords LEA. Swords town and its natural hinterland remain united in a single LEA.
- The variation from the average level of representation is significantly more balanced.

Cons

- Requires the separation of Malahide from Howth. It should be noted by the Committee however, that Howth and Malahide have only been united as a single LEA since 2009.
- This LEA would be a largely artificial creation, designed only to comply with the Minister's terms of reference.

SUMMARY

I wish to conclude by reiterating to the Committee that the wisest course of action is to recommend the retention of the current LEAs. The imposition of change is driven solely by the Minister, and the current LEAs are serving the people of Fingal well. If the Committee is to make a recommendation within the terms of reference, I suggest that one of the options mentioned above should be considered.

Sincerely,

Samuel O'Connor