
Galway County Local Electoral Area Review

Submission

Cllr. James Charity

1. Terms of Reference

In making the within submission with respect to the Galway County area, regard is had to the Boundary Commission's Terms of Reference providing that its function is:-

1. *To review and to make recommendations on the division of Galway County into local electoral areas and the number of members to be assigned to each such electoral area;*
2. *For the purpose of the review, the Committee should have regard to the population as ascertained at Census 2016, should assume no change in the total membership of Galway County Council as specified in the Local Government Act 2001 as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and should endeavour, as far as practicable and subject to the other requirements of these terms of reference, to achieve variance from individual average local authority representation within the range of plus or minus 10%;*
3. *The number of councillors assigned to a local electoral area shall be not less than 5 and not more than 7 provided that in particular compelling circumstances 3 or 4 seat local electoral areas may be recommended, where otherwise the geographic size of the area would be disproportionately large;*
4. *Local electoral areas should be designed, as far as possible, around urban centres, taking due account of local and community identities and linkages as well as natural boundaries 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;*
5. *In making recommendations in relation to local electoral areas the Committee should take account of the following proposals in relation to the configuration of Municipal Districts:*
 - (i) *Municipal Districts may be divided into 2 or more local electoral areas as the Committee considers appropriate;*

(ii) *The number of Municipal District Members for each district shall not be less than 6 save where, in exceptional circumstances (for example, related to population), the Committee considers that it is necessary that a district should consist of a single local electoral area, in which case the number of members shall not be less than 5.*

6. *The Committee shall have regard to Government policy in relation to local government, including any further reports, statements or decisions in that regard during the course of the review, and to any further guidance or requirements issued by the Minister.*

2. Census 2011 & Current Municipal District Structure

At present, it is noted that the membership of Galway County Council is made up of 39 Councillors across five Municipal Districts, the distribution of which is made up as follows:-

(a) Athenry-Oranmore:	7 members
(b) Tuam:	9 members
(c) Loughrea:	8 members
(d) Ballinasloe:	6 members
(e) Connemara:	9 members

It is further observed that the membership of Galway County Council, and the consequent membership of each Municipal District, was determined by the Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee in its 2013 report.

The Terms of Reference for that Committee¹ specified that subject to a maximum of 40 and a minimum of 18, there should be one member for every 4830 population in each Council area.² It was further specified that within each city or county, the **variance** in representation from the average for the city or county should, insofar as possible, be within a range of +/- 10%, a target that was reached in every local electoral area throughout the County contained in that report.³

¹ Page 7-8, Local Electoral Boundary Commission Report 2013

² Paragraph 9, Page 8, Local Electoral Boundary Commission Report 2013

³ Paragraph 3.7, Page 19, Local Electoral Boundary Commission Report 2013

The Terms of Reference for the extant committee provide that regard should be had to the population ascertained at Census 2016 and assume no overall change in the number of members of Galway County Council. It is also noted that there is specific reference to the +/- 10% variance⁴ when revising the Municipal District structure in County Galway and the make-up of membership of each such Municipal District area, subject to the maximum existing number of 39 Councillors.

The overall population of County Galway in Census 2011 was 175,124 persons, meaning that a 36 member local authority should have ordinarily been created. However, three additional Councillors were provided for by reason of the fact that 3 Town Councils were being disbanded, meaning a total membership of 39 Councillors.⁵ In determining the membership of the Municipal Districts, the 2013 report noted:- *“Based on the new number of councillors, the population per member in Galway County is 4,490. The terms of reference provide that “within any city or county the variance in representation of each local electoral area from the average for the city or county should, as far as practicable, be within a range of +/- 10%”. For Galway County, this represents a range of 4,041 to 4,939.”*

Consequently, the Committee recommended the following composition:-

Local Electoral Areas	Number of members	Population 2011	Population per member	Percentage variance from county average +/- %
Ballinasloe	6	24,561	4,094	-8.8
Conamara	9	39,238	4,360	-2.9
Loughrea	8	37,416	4,677	+4.2
Athenry - Oranmore	7	33,415	4,774	+6.3
Tuam	9	40,494	4,499	+0.2
Total	39	175,124		

⁴ Paragraph 2, Terms of Reference

⁵ Page 58, Local Electoral Boundary Commission Report 2013

3. Census 2016 & Current Municipal District Structure

In Census 2016, the overall population of County Galway increased to 179,390, or an increase of 4266 persons. Consequently, this means that the population per member which this Committee must have regard to is 4600. Allowing for a variance of +/-10% as provided for in the Terms of Reference, the range of population for any Municipal District considered by this Committee's report must be between 4140 and 5060. Applying same to the current Municipal District structure would read as follows:-

Local Electoral Areas	Number of Members	Population 2016	Population per Member	Percentage variance from county average +/- %
Ballinasloe	6	24,646	4108	-10.7%
Conamara	9	38,532	4281	-6.9%
Loughrea	8	39,346	4918	+6.9%
Athenry-Oranmore	7	35,158	5023	+9.2%
Tuam	9	41,708	4634	+0.7%
Total	39	179,390		

It is therefore consequently clear that in the event the current Municipal District structure was being retained, and based on the above formula and the +/- 10% variance which the committee is bound to have regard to based on its Terms of Reference, a re—distribution of Councillors with an additional Councillor would be assigned to the Athenry-Oranmore Municipal District, which would become an 8 seat MD.

4. New Municipal District Structures

Having regard to the above and, in particular, Paragraphs 2, 3 and 5 of this Committee's Terms of Reference, it appears that a distinction is made between Local Electoral Areas and Municipal Districts. While it is submitted that this distinction is entirely unhelpful, it seems that an electoral area can now have not less than 5 and not more than 7 Councillors, save that in particular compelling circumstances a 3 or 4 seat local electoral area may be recommended.

However, while Municipal Districts may be divided into two or more electoral areas, it is also provided that the membership of any individual MD should not be less than 6, save that in exceptional circumstances it may amount to five.

(i) Conamara

The distinct geographic and cultural identity of the Conamara region means it would be best served by maintaining the status quo insofar as possible. While the Terms of Reference provide that a Municipal District shall have no less than 6 Councillors, it does not appear to envisage an upper limit.

Clearly, the division of the MD into two 5 and 4 seat electoral areas which would form part of a wider Conamara MD would seem the most logical interpretation of the Terms of Reference to maintain the wider Conamara MD and avoid any significant changes. This would also maintain the unique identity of the Conamara area and its representation.

(ii) Remaining Districts

With 30 Councillors remaining across 4 Municipal Districts, it is clear that both the Tuam and Loughrea Municipal Districts, with 9 and 8 Councillors apiece, would have to be subdivided into two electoral areas which both elected 4/5 and 4/4 members respectively to two wider Tuam and Loughrea MD's in order to maintain the status quo.

This scenario however assumes no change to both the memberships of the Athenry-Oranmore (7) and Ballinasloe (6) Municipal Districts from their current compositions, which in light of the

requirement for the Committee to have regard to the +/- 10% variance per Paragraph 2 of the Terms of Reference is impossible.

Furthermore, applying the +/- 10% variance per Census 2016 above in providing that the Athenry-Oranmore District would ordinarily increase to 8 members and the Ballinasloe decrease to 5 members, it is clear that the former would fall foul of Paragraph 3 of the Terms of Reference relating to electoral areas and the latter potentially fall foul of Paragraph 5(ii) of the Terms of Reference unless the Committee considered exceptional circumstances applied.

In light of all the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that the most obvious and logical solution is to create an additional Municipal District and allow each of the five newly composed Districts to form their own Municipal and Electoral areas of 6 members per District.

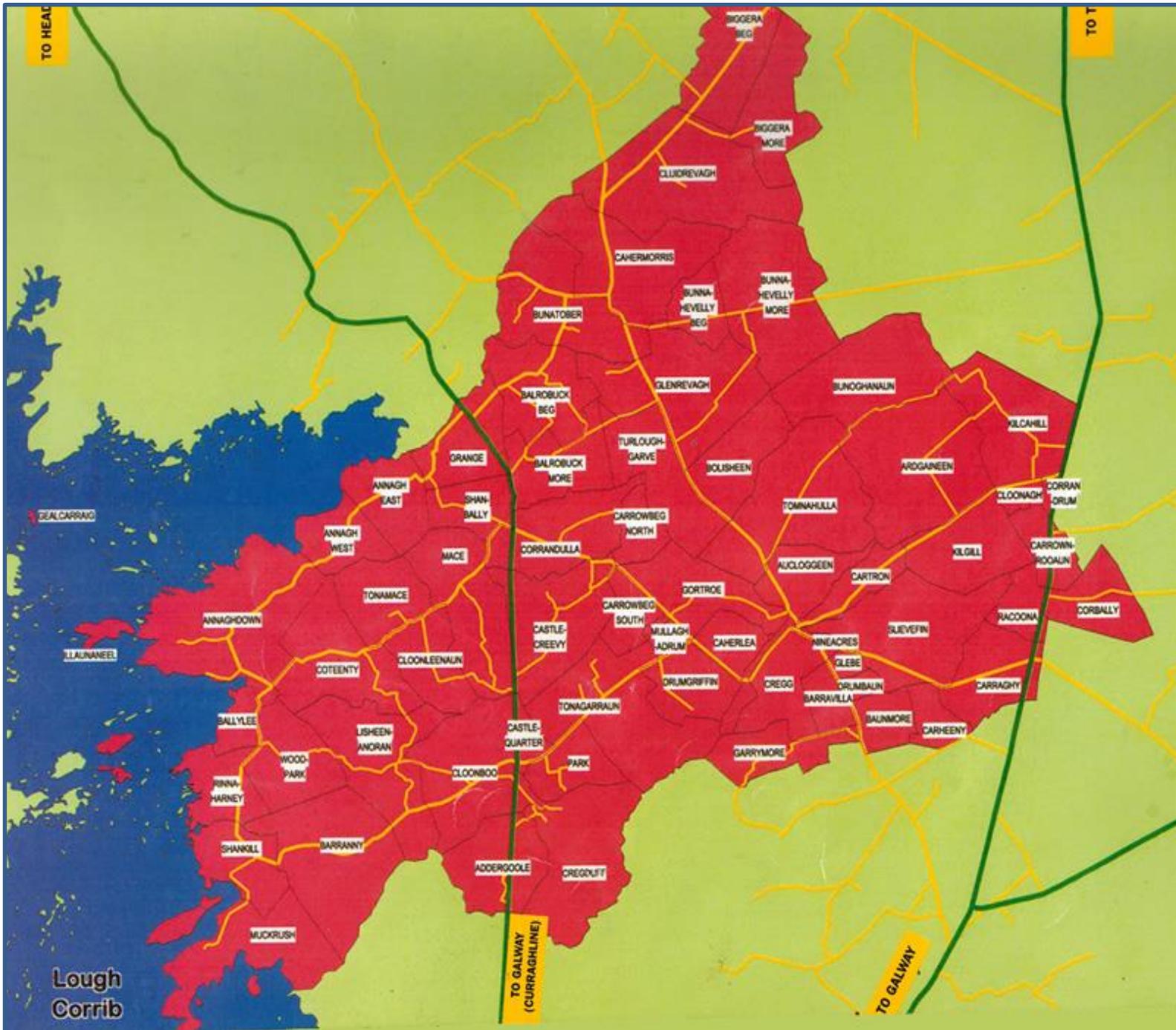
5. Parish of Annaghdown

In not making any specific reference or observations as to the geographic composition of such a new Municipal District area, I nonetheless wish to draw the Committee's specific attention to the parish of Annaghdown which is currently divided between the Athenry-Oranmore and Tuam Municipal Districts respectively. The Annaghdown area comprises of four electoral divisions, namely:-

Electoral Division	Municipal District	2011 Population	2016 Population	Males (2016)	Females (2016)	% Change
Liscananaun	Athenry-Oranmore	1432	1533	795	738	+7.1%
Eanach Dhúin	Athenry-Oranmore	1860	1885	1005	880	+1.3%
Annaghdown	Tuam	1381	1380	700	680	-0.1%
Killower	Tuam	851	885	448	437	+3.8%
Total		5524	5683	2948	2735	+2.88%

Prior to the electoral boundary changes in 2009, the four ED's referenced above and the entire wider parish of Annaghdown were situate in the one Electoral Area, namely the Oranmore Electoral Area. Since 2009, the parish of Annaghdown has effectively been split in two within two separate MD's.

The map below of the parish area and it's townlands as prepared by Annaghdown Parish Council illustrates this:-



It is therefore submitted that in any reconfiguration that takes place by this Committee, these four ED's should be reunited and maintained within the one electoral area and Municipal

District, particularly in light of Paragraph 4 of the Committee's Terms of Reference providing that it take "...*due account of local and community identities and linkages as well as natural boundaries and the need to facilitate the effectiveness of the governance and representational roles of elected members...*"

Ends

Cllr. James Charity