

Submission on Local Electoral Boundaries

Wexford County Council

Cllr. Malcolm Byrne, Gorey.

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General Observations

Wexford County Council has 34 members elected from four local electoral areas focused on the four main towns in the County – Gorey (8 members), Enniscorthy (8), Wexford (10) and New Ross (8). The municipal district system in place since 2014 has generally worked well and if the numbers of seats per district were to continue to be permitted at eight or more, minimal changes would be required, only allowing for a rebalancing because of population shifts. Even if a maximum of eight seats were permitted, this could have provided for the splitting of the Wexford District into two five seaters: one focused on Wexford town and the other on the rural part of that District. This relatively minimal disruption would have been preferable but it is appreciated that the Committee must work within its terms of reference.

The decision that local electoral areas should have between five and seven members will mean significant changes in how the electoral areas in Co. Wexford will now be constructed and will require at least one new electoral area. There will be consequent administrative disruption in how services are provided at local level as a result.

Working within the terms of reference, Wexford could now have the following combinations of electoral areas –

Four x Seven Seats and One x Six Seat

Two x Seven Seats and Four x Five Seats

One x Seven Seat, Two x Six Seats, Three x Five Seats

However, the Commission has the power, in certain circumstances where electoral areas might be too large or unwieldy, to provide for three and four seat electoral areas and in the case of Co. Wexford, this could prove to be useful.

That could leave the option of Three Seven Seats, Two Five Seats and a Three Seat, for example.

The Gorey electoral area has been the fastest growing over the last two decades and in the inter-Census period 2011 to 2016, grew in population numbers equivalent to the other three areas combined. This trend is set to continue.

Guiding Principles

In as far as possible, villages and communities should not be split between two electoral areas. This leads to difficulties in the planning and co-ordination of services. For example, in the past, the village of Kilmuckridge (including Ford) was split between Gorey and Enniscorthy electoral areas and this was not viewed as satisfactory by Council officials, Councillors or residents in the village. At present, there are a number of villages and communities split between Gorey and Enniscorthy electoral areas – Blackwater (Ballyvaldon); Boolavogue; Kilrush/Askamore; Ferns. Those communities are best served by being located in one electoral area and not divided.

There should not be significant variation in the number of residents per Council seat between electoral areas. In that regard, with a Census 2016 population of 149,722, each of the 34 Councillors in Wexford should represent an average of approx. 4,404 citizens.

This would mean the following populations (approx) for each electoral area:

Five seats – 22,018

Six seats – 26,422

Seven seats – 30,825

Establishment of Electoral Areas

The Terms of Reference for the Committee require that at least one new electoral area be established in Wexford. In addition, a maximum of seven seats in any electoral area will mean significant population movements between existing areas.

There is some logic to the establishment of an electoral area focused on Wexford town and for the existing rural part of the Wexford district on its own or combined with some of the rural areas in New Ross and Enniscorthy to have sufficient numbers to establish a new electoral area.

This will, in turn, require moving some of the southern parts of the Gorey electoral area into Enniscorthy. In this scenario, there will be significant movements of population between the electoral areas and some may become geographically challenging.

Creating a sixth electoral area could be considered.

New Bunclody Electoral Area

Bunclody could act as a focal point with its own identity and a number of existing Council facilities, but there is an insufficient population base in the immediate vicinity for this to be considered for a five to seven seat area. It would require the inclusion of a significant part of the west of the County to meet the population requirements of an electoral area. An option here, however, may be to consider the exceptional circumstances that might permit electoral areas of fewer than five seats.

For example, the Commission could consider creating a three-seater based around Bunclody with a population of c. 13,000 and combining the following areas (drawn from AIRO maps on 2016 data with population) –

Ballindaggan – 803

Ballycarney - 434

Castledockrell - 427

Ferns - 1,557

Kilbora - 381

Killann - 1,016

Killoughrum - 846

Kilrush - 464

Kiltealy - 457

Marshalstown - 1,076

Moyacomb - 407

Newtownbarry (Bunclody) - 2,273

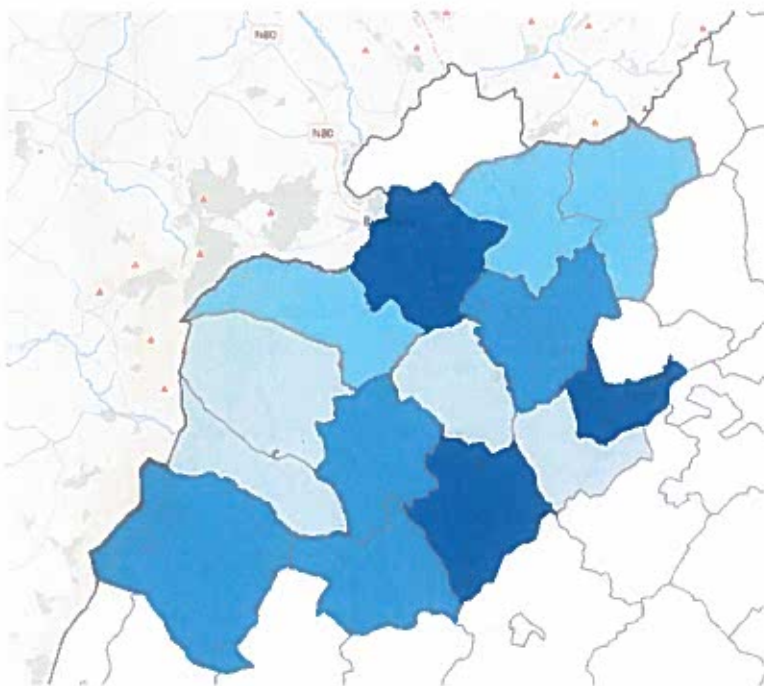
Rossard - 450

St. Mary's - 699

Tombrack - 729

Ballybeg - 596

Ballyellis – 412



Suggested Three Seat Bunclody Electoral Area

This area would fulfil the requirements of a community focal point and local linkages without being too large geographically and would also remove population from the Gorey and Enniscorthy electoral areas which could provide for their reduction to seven seats each.

I write with no vested interest in this as I am from Gorey town but do want to see logical electoral areas established with a focal point and not administrative nightmares.

Wexford Town Municipal Electoral Area

The current Wexford electoral area is ten seats and the easiest thing for the County would have been to divide this into two five seat areas (one urban focused on Wexford town and the other rural, focused on the Wexford town hinterland and on the South of the County) and rebalance some of the population in the other three areas (each of the three retaining eight seats). However, with the terms of reference providing for a maximum of seven seats, this is not possible.

If the Commission were to create the Wexford town and South Wexford electoral areas of six seats and seven seats respectively, this would require significant movement of population among the other electoral areas. It will also result in them being geographically unwieldy.

By creating two five seat electoral areas, it will limit the redrawing of the current Wexford local electoral area boundary. This would then leave 24 seats to be divided across the remainder of the County's electoral areas and the creation of a Bunclody three seat electoral area would allow for three seven seat areas focused on each of Gorey, Enniscorthy and New Ross.

Historical Significance

The area covered in the proposal for a new Bunclody electoral area would historically have formed much of the historic Barony of Scarawalsh (Enniscorthy town was at the Southeastern edge of this Barony) while the South Wexford electoral area will comprise much of the historical baronies of Forth and Bargo.