

18.095

## 1. General.

A. The last boundary review of local electoral areas had its genesis in the abolishing of Town Councils and establishing Municipal District Councils. At the time I was a member of the Oireachtas and supported it in the belief that Town Councils would develop into District Councils. This would result in the County Councils devolving power to a lower level, giving affect to the subsidiary concept. All areas would now have a local council, with more authority, funding and staff. However in most cases this has not materialised. Areas that previously had Town Councils, have lost authority, funding and staff. In County Wicklow a visit to the old Town Council headquarters in Arklow, Bray, Greystones and Wicklow Town will demonstrate this. In contrast rural areas now have some autonomy, where before they had none. However much more is needed. I realise that your terms of reference are silent on this. A flexible approach to term of reference number 8 could address this.

### B. Recommendation.

Enhanced powers, staff and funding be given to Municipal Districts.

## 2. Terms of Reference.

### A. General

Weaknesses in terms of reference, or the absence of a draft report subject to amendment, have led to errors in the past. This gave rise to unsustainable situations whereby cities and towns like Kilkenny and Carrigaline ended up being split by Municipal Districts. The lack of flexibility in the terms of reference of this report can lead to outcomes that may not best serve the administration of local government.

### B. Recommendations.

(1) Strict adherence to the + or - 10%, born out of a judicial decision on Dáil Constituencies, may result in people from basically the same area voting in the one rural community hall for candidates in different Municipal Districts e.g. Tinahely and Askanagap in County Wicklow. This should be avoided at all costs.

(2) There is a strong emphasis placed on avoiding " large geographic areas". I have often heard this complaint from elected representatives but rarely from the public. The fact that a Municipal District maybe as big as a Dáil Constituency should be irrelevant, where stands West Cork and Dublin City. It is my contention that the more important issue is that, in as far as possible, the number of elected members in each Municipal District in a County Council area is similar. County Wicklow, with 1x8, and 4x6 is a good fit. It basically gives a critical mass to each area and the distribution of staff and funding is more transparent than having a couple of 1x3. This transparency encourages equal treatment. In addition elected members are inclined to concentrate their service in a particular area of the district.

(3) Term 7 references " one or more electoral areas in the same Municipal District ". This flows from (1) and (2) above. To adopt such a policy would be the very antithesis of local democracy. Public representatives who make decisions at local level must be accountable to that electorate. Equally the electorate must be subject to the decisions by those that they elect. In the old system the people of the towns of Arklow, Bray, Wicklow and to a lesser degree Greystones, voted for members of Wicklow County Council, a body which had limited powers and functions with respect to those towns. This had an inherent weakness. In general to split Municipal Districts into different electoral areas is very undesirable. I realise that in the case of large cities Committee Number 2 will have little choice in the matter,

however with respect to Committees Number 1 it should be avoided at all cost. Splitting Municipal Districts will limit accountability and responsibility, two cornerstones of democratic representation.

### 3. Boundary Changes in Wicklow.

#### A. General

(1) The level of representation should remain 1x8 and 4x6, irrespective of minor population changes.

(2) Broadly speaking the boundaries should remain the same.

(3) No Municipal District should be split into different electoral areas.

#### B. Specific

(1). All those that vote in Tinahely and Askanagap ( the DED areas of Tinahely and Aughavanagh ) should be part of the Baltinglass Municipal District. This is adopting a common sense approach.

(2). Consideration should be given to locating all of the DED of Ballinglen in the Baltinglass area.

(3). Consideration should be given to locating the new housing estate of Blessington Manor in Blessington which is in County Kildare into the Baltinglass Municipal District

(4). Consideration should be given to relocating Rathdrum back to its traditional area of Wicklow.

(5). Views on (2), (3) and (4) above should be informed by submissions from Wicklow County Council and the relevant Municipal Districts, and from Kildare County Council on (2).

### 4. Conclusion.

Changes to local electoral boundaries have occurred roughly every ten years over the last half century. Consistency and stability are important in local government. Constant boundary changes undermine this. Unlike Dáil constituencies there is no constitutional requirement to make change. There is no requirement or benefit to making constant boundary changes. The Minister should not fear flexibility with the terms of reference or producing a draft report. Local consultation is imperative, notwithstanding the facility to make submissions. Better make amendments now than face the constant clamour to address blatant shortcomings eg Kilkenny City.

Yours sincerely  
Billy Timmins