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To the Secretary Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees 2017,

I wish to make the following submission in respect of the Local Electoral Area Boundary review process.

Notwithstanding the fact that I believe the huge deficiencies, which currently exist within the democratic local government system have been made even worse by the decision to abolish town councils and that this process will not address those deficiencies in any meaningful way I wish to make the following points:

1) In respect of the proposal to establish Borough Council districts for town population centres in excess of 30,000 persons I believe it is critical that for these Municipal Districts to operate with any impact they must receive stand alone budgetary powers independent of the County Council.

2) In conjunction with real budgetary powers it is essential that these Borough Councils will have full powers to set the rateable valuation for the businesses in their administrative area. The elected members in each large urban area are the best placed to set the rates for their town. Giving the local forces that can impact on the economic area of each town in a county the power to be able to set the rates for a large urban town is a key one in the independence of Borough Councils from the county budget.

3) LPT variation powers for the properties that compromise the administrative boundary area of the Borough Council should equally be set by the members of these administrative area and the retention of the majority of the funds within the borough council area in which it was raised is something which this commission should examine.

Conscious of the fact that the Local Property Tax came into force after the abolition of the town councils the impact of the funds raised from them has never been realised in urban centres as they go into the central county council budget.

4) Furthermore that these Borough Councils have their statutory planning powers restored so that they can exert real influence over the commercial and residential futures of the people they are there to serve.

Dedicated statutory town development plans drawn up and passed by the elected members of the administrative area are the real way in which the future of the town can be properly charted.

5) While boundaries will be set to create these Borough Councils based on a 30,000 threshold there is every possibility that mistakes of the past will be repeated as people living in these towns find themselves outside the administrative boundaries.

Many large urban centres, which would fall under this category for Borough Councils, are experiencing development growth once again and new housing developments are being initiated as we speak.

Looking at the prospective boundary being drawn up for the town of Navan it is clearly evident that people who clearly identify themselves as Navan people are going to be left outside the new Borough Council boundaries and this will undoubtedly be replicated in other towns across Ireland. To counteract such a scenario it is imperative that the boundary review group would take cognisance of a towns development plan and be conscious of what areas have been zoned and earmarked for future development so that they are not left outside the new boundary.

Ireland is as a country moving distinctively towards a society based around major urban centres yet the democratic deficiency in these urban areas is profound.

If under this review those same areas, which will become Borough Council districts, are not afforded real powers by way of statutory budgetary and planning powers then this process is nothing more than window dressing and a farcical exercise.

We have one of the highest ratios across Western Europe of elected members to the public yet under this review things are only going to get worse.

The people who live in these major towns, by virtue of the ever growing trend towards the urbanisation of Ireland, deserve to have proper democratic bodies who can act with proper authoratitice power to give them the facilities they deserve and critically a forum which the Public can genuinely hold to account.

Not a forum which has been neutered from the get go because the Department of Local Government do not want to devolve powers in a true and meaningful way.

If these Borough Councils are not afforded real powers then their ability to actually meet the challenges of our growing urbanised areas, both from a physical infrastructure and social infrastructure point of view, will be totally ineffective.

I would appeal to the Boundary Review Group to take account of these points so that a proper system can be initiated and that real and effective powers be granted to these new Borough Councils.

Kind Regards,

Shane Cassells T.D.

Meath West Constituency

Fianna Fáil Spokesperson for Local Government