

18.421

Title: Submission to Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee No. 2

From: FG Group Cork City Council

Date: 9th May 2018

The expansion of Cork City offers unique and historical opportunities for the development of the city. This development will be for the betterment of the people of Cork, those who work, shop and partake in recreation and leisure in the city as well as for the commercial life of the city. This expansion is the most significant in over fifty years and will see the population of the city and the landmass of the city grow significantly.

Presentations from Cork City Council to the Working Groups on the development of a proposal to effect change through a revised city boundary have argued that the benefits could include:

- Effective planning and delivery of development and infrastructure
- Providing for differences between metropolitan and rural areas
- Financial viability and sustainability
- Capacity to maintain, improve, and expand services into the future
- Clear and readily understandable governance
- Effective local democratic representation, subsidiarity and accountable leadership.

To facilitate the changes required to create two sustainable local authorities in Cork there is a need for close and effective working and relationships between Central Government, the Executive and Management Teams of both Authorities and the local elected public representatives. This submission speaks to the number of public representatives and how they are allocated.

The Terms of Reference as published lift certain sections of the McKinnon Report but fail to address other issues of significant concern. The Terms of Reference includes Section 12.1.8 which states that “A newly expanded Cork City Council should also move to introduce an area- or district based structure for the wider city area, based on five areas (including the city centre).” However it fails to mention or reference a significant number of other sections that call clearly for an increase in the number of seats for the newly formed Cork City Council.

McKinnon in his report under a number of different headings quoted below makes specific reference to governance, the role of elected members and the importance of structures based on local areas or defined geographic boundaries.

7.8 Clear and readily understandable governance

7.8.1 Local government structures should be clear and easy to understand for citizens and local communities. They should also allow for transparent and responsive decision-making and for clear responsibility and lines of accessibility to services.

7.9 Effective local democratic representation, subsidiarity and accountable leadership

7.9.1 Any new arrangements should ensure there is a clear and accountable leadership structure, at both political and executive level. They should equally allow

for decision-making on operational issues to be devolved as far as possible, with structures closer to the citizen, and for models of service provision that allow citizens to access services at a localised level. They should also ensure that there is a broad balance in terms of the population / Councillor ratio across Cork.

If there was no change to the structures of local government, McKinnon commenting on the proposal to maintain the status quo acknowledged that the quantum of Cllrs for the City was appropriate but that there was a need for additional Cllrs in the County.

“9.2.9 While there is little justification or appetite for increasing the ratio of councillors to population within the city, there is a case for increasing the number of councillors representing the extensive electoral areas in rural Cork. This could be achieved without any boundary change between city and county.”

In following this rationale the de facto understanding is that additional councillors were required for an unaltered county. Councillors follow the population and the population is largely in the area incoming to the city. It should therefore follow that some of the additional county councillor seats required to service this population should move with them.

Crucially, the report is quite clear about the number of Councillors it projects for the City as articulated under Chapter 12, Section 1.4.

12.1.4 The Group recognises the advantages in having a smaller number of citizens per Councillor in local authorities – it should make Councillors more accessible to their electorate, leading to greater awareness of different views and issues within their community. Applying the approach of the Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee to the new local authority areas recommended in this report, an expanded Cork City Council of some 215,000 people (also based on Census 2011) would have 45 elected members ...

Recognising that 45 Councillors would be too many that proposal is amended under Recommendations 13.4

The number of elected Councillors in both local authorities should be revised to reflect a better balance of representation – based on the recommendations in this report, a newly configured Cork County Council should have 56 elected members and a newly configured Cork City Council should have 39 elected members.

Recommendation:

The newly formed Cork City Council will be grossly underrepresented under the proposed configuration and the number of seats should be increased from 31 to 39.

Configuration of Electoral Areas:

The Terms of Reference in relation to Cork City: Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee 2 specifies the criteria that will guide its decision making. Criteria 4 and 5 are of most relevance here in that they specify the need to have electoral areas that do not have less than 5 and no more than seven. There is also the expressed wish that

“Local electoral areas should be designed, as far as possible, around urban villages or have a neighbourhood focal point (or points), taking due account of local and

community identities and linkages and the need to facilitate the effectiveness of the governance and representational roles of elected members ...”

And also that there is a need to

“avoid designating local electoral areas which are territorially very large or extend over very long distances or over multiple urban villages, or which divide individual urban villages or natural communities.”

It is our view that these criteria cannot be fulfilled and are anomalous to each other given the population required to satisfy the ratio for the total population and the number of proposed Councillors.

Approximate population requirements for Electoral Areas	
5 Councillors	33,000 population
6 Councillors	40,000 population
7 Councillors	47,000 population

We are also mindful that the River Lee creates a symbolic geographic divide in the City Centre with the current provision of City Council services, Health services, educational, sporting and others being provided on the basis of catchment areas identified by the river, for example the HSE Disability services are divided on a North Lee and a South Lee basis. It is further complicated by the fact that the majority of the population under current governance and the future plan will reside on the south side of the city.

To create a City Centre Electoral Area would require bringing together elements or portions from each of the existing city centre wards without a clear basis or rationale for doing so. Currently there is not as population within the city centre that is cohesive or sustainable for an independent electoral area. A new city centre electoral area would bring together partial areas that do not have existing relationship and would also split cohesive areas. If the aim of the objective is to create an Electoral Area with responsibility for the city centre this would be better achieved by including a part of the city centre in each new electoral area with the possibility of creating a City Centre Committee drawn up of members from each new ward.

Understanding and acceptance of the new arrangements by all stakeholders is important. It would be desirable through the creation of electoral areas to promote and facilitate inclusion and shared responsibility. Ideally each new local electoral area would be established with area and population from both the “old” city council area and the incoming “new” county council area. This would facilitate a new integrated and inclusive approach to local representation. It would also mean that each electoral area had commonality of urban and rural elements.

Given the ratio of Councillors to population as per the terms of reference with a fixed council of 31 seats, no current village, suburb or defined area has sufficient population to become its own electoral area. Therefore there will be a need to combine areas together to make “best-fit” divisions. There are a number of identifiable social and geographical linkages that can facilitate this.

1. Turners Cross/Ballyphehane to Grange Frankfield via Togher Rural and Leghanmore.

2. Blackrock//Ballinlough/Ballintemple onto Douglas, Douglas Rural and Rochestown. This would have the benefit of having the responsibility for both sides of the estuary in this location.
3. Mardyke, Glasheen, Bishopstown onto Ballincollig with connectivity through the Ballincollig By-Pass, Curraheen Road, Model Farm Road and the Carrigrohane Road.
4. Sundays Well, Hollyhill out to Blarney and Tower
5. Mayfield, Montenotte out towards Glanmire and the north east rural area.

It is possible to create two northern electoral areas and three southern electoral areas and still be within the 10% variation as recommended by the terms of reference.

Recommendation

The newly formed Cork City Council will be grossly underrepresented under the proposed configuration and the number of seats should be increased from 31 to 39.

Any proposal for the development of electoral areas should recognise the River Lee as a natural boundary.

Each electoral area should contain an element of the city centre.

Create a new City Centre Committee of public representatives, community and resident groups, commercial representatives and the Executive Management Team.

To create five electoral areas – three on the south side of the city and two on the north side of the city to follow population dispersal and geographical considerations.

That naturally cohesive communities and local areas should remain integral and that current anomalies should be addressed.

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