



Mr. Martin Vaughan,
Secretary,
Electoral Area Boundary Committee,
Room 203,
Dept. of Environment, Heritage & Local Government,
Custom House,
Dublin 1.

7th March 2008.

Our Ref. GL/mm

Re: **Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees Consultation**

Dear Sir,

At special Council Meeting held on 7th March 2008 the Elected Members and Management of Westmeath County Council agreed to make the following submission in relation to Electoral Area Boundaries in County Westmeath.

In 2001 the "Better Local Government" reform programme commenced with many local authorities looking at their organisation with a view to making changes in structures to meet the changing needs of local government. As a result of this Westmeath County Council carried out an examination into its local government structure at that time and as a result of this, significant decentralisation of local management and operations to suit the then new electoral area boundaries was agreed and carried out. This involved the provision of new office developments (one-stop shop development) at local electoral area level in the main centres of population of each electoral area i.e. Castlepollard, Kilbeggan and Athlone and a new local area office for the Mullingar electoral areas has been located in the main County Buildings in Mullingar. Delivery of key services i.e. road maintenance and improvement, water and sewerage networks and plant, planning control, are located and carried out from these new decentralised office.

In addition the new area offices now provide facilities for the local elected Members of each electoral area to meet bi-monthly at Area Committee Meetings to deal with operational matters and also to consider recommendation to Council on policy and other matters where legally required to do so, e.g. Part VIII planning applications. Also the new structures required and facilitated the -

- Appointment of area administrative staff and technical staff under the management of an Area Director of Service to support the Area Committees and to manage and implement Council policy at local level;
- Improvement in customer service provision at local level by the realignment of former engineering areas to correspond with the new electoral area boundaries and provide necessary staffing to perform all functions including planning control functions;
- Movement of staffing numbers from centralised functional areas to the new Area Offices to give effect to the changed structures and deliver key service based on these established areas.

The existing electoral areas are important therefore for Westmeath County Council as management and operational areas as well as Area Committees of the elected Members (in the case of the two Mullingar electoral areas – a joint Area Committee). Each of the local electoral areas have new dedicated offices for local management and customer service and meetings of Area Committees with Planning and Technical staff assigned to implement all area operational matters and also deal with all planning applications at local level.

These changes were agreed locally between management and staff representatives after significant local discussions as well as getting the political agreement of the elected Members.

The current position in relation to geographical size of each electoral area is as follows:

<i>District</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>County %</i>
Coole	455.9 sq. kilometres	26%
Mullingar West	337.3 sq. kilometres	15.2%
Mullingar East	242.7 sq. kilometres	13.8%
Kilbeggan	523.9 sq. kilometres	29.8%
Athlone	196.4 sq. kilometres	11.2%

In order to make Coole a four seater constituency having regard to the requirements of the terms of reference of the Commission and the 10% plus or minus variation would require the transfer of 8 No. District Electoral Divisions from the Mullingar East and West electoral areas.

This would have the impact of making the Coole area approximately 33% of the geographical area of the county which it is considered would be disproportionately large and unwieldy. It would also require the transfer of District Electoral Divisions which are considered part of the Socio Economic hinterland of Mullingar town and would be detrimental to the provision of services to these District Electoral Divisions which would then be geographically located at the

extremity of the new revised Coole electoral area with the administrative centre at Castlepollard in the north of the county.

I would request therefore that the Electoral Area Boundary Committee give consideration to what has taken place since 1999 in terms of re-organisation in considering any proposed recommendations and to the geographical impact as outlined above. Any major changes in current electoral areas will require further examination and re-organisation of the area management structure, staffing levels and resulting in office accommodation level changes and implications for service delivery as well as further negotiations at local level and additional resources requirements to deliver the necessary changes. Any revised electoral areas therefore, should be avoided if at all possible so as not to impact significantly on resources and requiring major upheaval in service delivery at local level which has greatly improved as a result of the whole decentralisation process which has taken place in the county.

In relation to your letter of February 2008, the main elements of a settlement strategy for County Westmeath is set out in the recently adopted County Development Plan 2008-2014.

As a general principle, the Council through its policies will aim to :

- Concentrate population growth in the serviced urban areas with accelerated growth directed to the linked Gateway Towns of Athlone and Mullingar;
- Achieve balanced growth to sustain all parts of the County, gateways, urban catchments, rural areas and North Westmeath.

The settlement strategy is expressed in a settlement hierarchy as follows:

Tier 1: Gateway Towns; Mullingar and Athlone.

Tier 2: Centres for Growth; Moate, Castlepollard, Kilbeggan, Kinnegad.

Tier 3: Centres with further development potential; Rochfortbridge, Killucan/Rathwire, Clonmellon, Tyrrellspass, Delvin, Raharney, Ballynacargy, Collinstown, Ballymore, Multyfarnham, Miltownpass, Coole and Glasson.

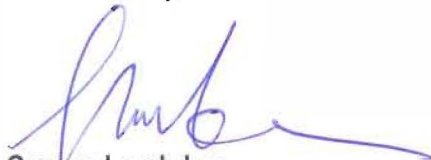
Tier 4: Centres with limited development potential, Ballinalack, Rathowen, Finnea, Ballinagore, Ballykeeran and Castletown-Geoghegan.

Tier 5: Unserviced settlements: The Downs, Loughnavalley, Rathconrath, Taghmon, Gainstown, Ballinea, Milltown, Dysart, Moyvore, Baylin, Castledaly, Mount Temple, Tang, Tubberclair, Ballinahown, Streamstown, Horseleap, Streete, Crookedwood, Drumcree, Castletown-Finea, Lismacaffrey, Archerstown (communal sewage treatment not acceptable, individual systems only).

The development of area offices throughout the county to support service delivery at local level reflects the Council's Strategic Settlement Strategy with offices located in the 2 no. Gateway Towns of Mullingar and Athlone and Area Offices in centres of growth i.e. Castlepollard in the Coole Electoral Area and Kilbeggan in the Kilbeggan Electoral Area.

I hope the above is of assistance to the Committee in their deliberations.

Yours faithfully,



**George Lambden,
Director of Services,
Corporate Affairs.**