

Cllr Noel Harrington,
Bank Place,
Castletownbere,
Co. Cork.
027 71000, 0868567178

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Re; Local Electoral Area Boundaries Review.

A Chara,

I would like to take this opportunity to submit some points for reflection by the committee regarding the review of the boundaries in Cork County.

Cork County is unique amongst other local authorities for a few reasons and needs to be dealt with differently as such.

Firstly, Cork County is divided in three distinct Divisions, North (comprising the electoral areas of Fermoy, Mallow and Kanturk), South (Bandon, Blarney, Carrigaline, Macroom and Midleton) and West (Bantry and Skibbereen). This division of the county, while political, is more importantly very much an Administrative divide to allow the county to function far more efficiently than as a single entity. The divisional administrations have worked extremely well for the citizens of Cork County.

Secondly, Cork is unique among Local Authorities in that the County has a hugely diverse population density. It has to be noted that the dynamic that has driven the demographic shift in population from rural to urban has occurred from within the county boundary itself, ie. Cork City and its Environs. This, under the terms of reference published would reflect a savage scenario for Cork Rural districts where the population has by and large remained static but could now see its representation being reduced. No other Local Authority that I am aware of has seen as extreme an increase in population and still has to deal with districts that have depopulated significantly.

I would submit that this divisional structure should remain in place with the existing management and staff complements and that the political representation should remain in place also. I would further submit that the committee should look not on the county as a whole but treats each division as a separate administrative structure. That the committee would then examine population disparities from within the divisions rather than as a county at large.

I would further submit that the committee would acknowledge that, recognising the dynamic increases in population in and around Cork City and its Environs, the terms of reference if strictly adhered to will create significant problems for Cork County uniquely.

The Bantry Electoral area is a very large geographical area with remote and peripheral peninsulas as well as many populated offshore islands. The distance for example from Dursey Island to Mizen Head is over 80 miles. The three main settlements are very dispersed, (Castletownbere to Bantry 32 miles, Bantry to Schull 18 miles, Castletownbere to Schull 50 miles). This does not take into account the more peripheral areas of the Electoral Area. The Bantry and Skibbereen Areas together make up the Western division of Cork County Council. The functional area of the Western division is greater than many other Counties but suffers from more extreme isolation and remoteness.

I would submit that any reduction in representation in this sprawling, remote, peripheral and difficult Electoral Area would be a severely disadvantageous to the people of this area and would make it next to impossible to adequately represent. The population, however has not fallen over the last census period, or indeed before that. It is therefore difficult to justify a reduction in representation.

To conclude, I believe that the divisional nature of Cork County Council should be respected and maintained as it has worked extremely well to the present. Any changes made of a political, administrative or geographical nature would have a profound effect on the economic and social balance that successive administrations have achieved between the economic force in South Cork and the less populated areas of North and West Cork. Using population figures alone will create a two dimensional picture of a region of many different dimensions, opportunities and challenges.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Noel Harrington