

Mr. Tom Sheridan  
Secretary  
Dublin and Cities Electoral Area Boundary Committee

Mr. Sheridan,

I would like to set out several points with respect to the work of the Dublin and Cities Electoral Area Boundary Committee, due to report not later than 20 June 2008, and particularly with respect to the level of representation on Fingal County Council.

### **1) Population and Council Representation of Fingal.**

The 2006 census shows that the Fingal area of Dublin has experienced a population surge over the course of the last decade. Its population now stands at some 240,000. It is served by 24 councillors, implying a ratio of approximately 10,000 residents per councillor. The national average ratio is approximately 4,800 residents per councillor. If we look at Leitrim, for example, there are only 1316 residents of Leitrim per councillor. The number of residents per councillor in Fingal is well over double the national average.

If we analyse this at a micro level, the Mulhuddart ward in Fingal, where 4 councillors serve a population of 53,306, compares to the Ballinamore district of Leitrim County Council where 6 councillors serve a population of only 6731.

This means that councillors in Mulhuddart have to serve more than ten times as many people as those in Ballinamore.

This is a startling anomaly and one which I, and the people of the Fingal area, would expect to be addressed by the committee while respecting, insofar as is reasonably practicable, its terms of reference.

Such imbalances, if not sufficiently addressed, will not only have knock-on effects in terms of constraining the future effectiveness of our local government, but will see a continuation of the regional imbalance in terms of electors to the Seanad, with residents in urban areas remaining significantly under-represented.

It should be noted that even within Fingal, there are significant imbalance with, for example, with Mulhuddart and Swords being 33% and 16% respectively above the mean (10,000) for Fingal with Howth (33%) and Malahide (26%) below the mean. While the imbalances on a national level are most stark, steps should also be taken to reduce imbalances within Fingal itself.

## **2) Integrity of Urban Centres.**

As far as practicable, the integrity of new urban centres, in particular of Swords & Blanchardstown should be respected.

There is a lot of anger in the Swords area, for instance, in relation to the splitting of the town between the Dublin West and Dublin North constituencies as proposed in the most recent independent review of Dáil constituency boundaries. I think it would be unfair to further split Swords in terms of local electoral wards. It would be very difficult for part-time councillors to represent either Mulhuddart or Castleknock in Dublin 15 as well as Swords, for example. There is no direct public transport link between the two areas rendering travel between them very time consuming, not least because of the traffic gridlock on the M50.

In terms of providing effective and consistent representation to such urban centres, it is essential that they not be split unnecessarily or arbitrarily between different constituencies or, as in this case, local authority areas. The people of Swords should continue to be represented by councillors based in and dedicated to the Swords area.

## **3) Terms of Reference of the Dublin and Cities Electoral Area Boundary Committee.**

It is obvious, comparing councillor representation throughout the country, that Fingal should get an increase in the number of councillors. It is extremely difficult for part-time public representatives to represent such a large number of people. The people of Fingal deserve to have a fair and reasonable number of councillors representing the bring council representation into line with the rest of the country.

With respect to the terms of reference, the committee has been directed to assume no change in the total membership of each local authority. This, however, may be severely at odds with the direction to the committee to achieve variance from individual average local authority representation within the range of + or – 10%. Ensuring relative equality of representation (i.e. the + or – 10% variance criterion) must be seen as the priority. If there is no way to address these imbalances without increasing the number of councillors per local authority area, then there should be no hesitation in recommending that the number of councillors be increased as appropriate.

Yours sincerely,



---

Joan Burton TD