

1 Summary and Overview

1.1 Background

The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government appointed the Committee on 8 January 2008 to review and make recommendations regarding the boundaries and memberships of local electoral areas in 30 local authority areas (i.e. 26 county councils, 2 borough councils and 2 town councils).

The terms of reference of the Committee required it to recommend local electoral areas that would –

- have between four and seven members or, in very exceptional circumstances, three members, and
- ensure a reasonable relationship (desirably keeping variances from the average to within + or –10%) between the population established by the 2006 Census and representation within each local authority.

The Committee was also required to take account of a number of factors, including the desirability of having electoral areas that –

- have urban or neighbourhood focal points
- preserve natural communities or the hinterlands of population centres
- are aligned, where possible, with Dáil constituency boundaries
- maintain continuity in relation to the arrangement of local electoral areas.

The terms of reference asked the Committee to assume that there should be no change in the number of members elected to each local authority.

There has been a substantial increase in population since the last review of local electoral areas in 1998, with population growth of 20.69% in the 26 county councils within the remit of the Committee. The range of population growth varied from 48.39% in Meath to 9.09% in Sligo. Some eleven counties had a population growth in excess of 20%. In addition to population changes and the changes in settlement

patterns, the Committee has also had to take account of considerable recent and prospective changes in the boundaries of Dáil constituencies.

The Committee invited submissions in relation to the review and 153 submissions were received, including from local authorities, political parties, public representatives, organisations and individuals. These were most helpful to the work of the Committee.

1.2 Recommendations

Population and Representation

The electoral areas recommended by the Committee would establish a reasonable relationship between the 2006 population and representation levels within each local authority. In many cases the Committee found the representational balance had gone outside the range of + or –10% set down in the terms of reference. The Dundalk No. 3 electoral area in Dundalk Town had a variance of –31.3% from the average representation while the Oranmore electoral area had a variance of +28.2% from the average representation in County Galway. In the case of all electoral areas, the Committee has been able to frame recommendations which would see the variations coming within the range of + or –10% from the local authority average population per member; in many cases, the variations are minimal. In the case of some electoral areas, the scope for the Committee to minimise variations has been limited by the need to take account of other considerations, including for example, neighbourhood focal points.

Alignment with Dáil constituency boundaries

13 of the 26 county councils within the Committee's remit are wholly contained within a single Dáil constituency so that the issue of alignment with Dáil constituency boundaries is already assured. A further six are mostly contained in a single Dáil constituency, although they also comprise small areas extending into a neighbouring constituency. None of these latter areas would have a population sufficient to support a 4 seat electoral area, so that in general there was a presumption against aligning these areas with their Dáil constituency boundaries. Of the seven remaining

counties, full alignment is recommended in four cases (Counties Galway, Donegal, Kerry and Leitrim) with a degree of alignment recommended in three cases (Counties Cork, Kildare and Meath).

Number of Members representing an electoral area

The following table shows the overall number of electoral areas by size (i.e. 3 to 7 members) recommended by the Committee.

	Total Electoral Areas	Electoral Areas by Size				
		7 Seats	6 Seats	5 Seats	4 Seats	3 Seats
Current	146	24	27	37	34	24
Recommended	140	27	25	35	50	3

The Committee's recommendations would see the number of 3 seat electoral areas reduced considerably while the number of 4 seat electoral areas is significantly increased. The numbers of 5, 6 and 7 seat electoral areas remain broadly comparable.

There are twenty four 3 seat electoral areas and the Committee carefully reviewed these in line with the terms of reference. In only three cases, the Committee recommends that the 3 seat electoral areas should be continued on the basis of very exceptional circumstances as envisaged by the terms of reference. These electoral areas are Bandon, County Cork; Baltinglass, County Wicklow; and Dingle, County Kerry. In all other cases the Committee has considered it appropriate in the light of its terms of reference to recommend electoral areas with between 4 and 7 councillors.

Maintaining Continuity

Notwithstanding considerable population and other changes relevant to its terms of reference, the Committee was also mindful of the desirability of maintaining continuity with present electoral arrangements. The table on the next page compares the current and recommended positions in relation to the overall arrangement of electoral areas within local authorities reviewed.

Table: Current and recommended electoral Areas by size

Local Authority (Members)	Current Position						Recommended Position					
	Electoral Areas	7 Seaters	6 Seaters	5 Seaters	4 Seaters	3 Seaters	Electoral Areas	7 Seaters	6 Seaters	5 Seaters	4 Seaters	3 Seaters
County Councils												
Carlow (21)	5	0	0	3	0	2	5	0	0	1	4	0
Cavan (25)	4	2	1	1	0	0	4	2	1	1	0	0
Clare (32)	6	2	1	1	1	1	6	0	3	2	1	0
Cork (Total 48)												
- Cork North (13)	3	0	0	1	2	0	3	0	0	1	2	0
- Cork South (23)	5	1	1	0	1	2	5	0	2	0	2	1
- Cork West (12)	2	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0
Donegal (29)	6	0	3	1	0	2	5	2	0	3	0	0
Galway (30)	5	3	0	1	1	0	5	3	0	1	1	0
Kerry (27)	5	1	2	1	0	1	5	2	0	2	0	1
Kildare (25)	6	0	1	1	2	2	5	0	2	1	2	0
Kilkenny (26)	5	1	1	2	0	1	5	1	1	1	2	0
Laois (25)	5	1	1	0	3	0	5	1	1	0	3	0
Leitrim (22)	4	0	2	2	0	0	4	1	0	3	0	0
Limerick (28)	5	2	0	2	1	0	5	2	0	2	1	0
Longford (21)	4	1	1	1	0	1	4	1	1	0	2	0
Louth (26)	5	0	2	2	1	0	5	0	2	2	1	0
Mayo (31)	7	0	2	0	4	1	6	1	2	0	3	0
Meath (29)	5	1	2	2	0	0	5	2	1	1	1	0
Monaghan (20)	4	0	1	2	1	0	4	1	0	1	2	0
Offaly (21)	4	1	0	2	1	0	4	1	0	2	1	0
Roscommon (26)	6	0	0	3	2	1	5	1	1	1	2	0
Sligo (25)	5	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	0	3	0
Tipperary North (21)	4	1	1	1	0	1	4	0	1	3	0	0
Tipperary South (26)	5	1	1	1	2	0	5	1	1	1	2	0
Waterford (23)	5	1	1	0	1	2	4	1	2	0	1	0
Westmeath (23)	5	1	0	1	2	1	5	0	1	1	3	0
Wexford (21)	4	1	0	2	1	0	4	1	0	2	1	0
Wicklow (24)	5	1	0	2	1	1	5	1	0	2	1	1
Borough Councils												
Drogheda (12)	3	0	1	0	0	2	2	0	2	0	0	0
Sligo (12)	3	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	3	0
Town Councils												
Bray (12)	3	0	1	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	3	0
Dundalk (12)	3	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	3	0
Totals	146	24	27	37	34	24	140	27	25	35	50	3

2 Appointment of Committee and Terms of Reference

2.1 Appointment of Committee

The Committee was appointed by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on 8 January 2008 to review the arrangement of electoral areas in each county outside of Dublin, and in the boroughs of Drogheda and Sligo and the towns of Bray and Dundalk.

At the same time the Minister established the Dublin and Cities Committee to review electoral areas in the cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford, and in the three Dublin County Councils of Fingal, Dún-Laoghaire Rathdown and South Dublin.

The work of both Committees follows on previous reviews of local electoral areas carried out in 1985 and 1998 (see appendix IV).

2.2 Terms of Reference

The Committee's terms of reference were as follows:-

- 1. To review and to make recommendations, subject to paragraph 2, on the division of each county (other than Fingal, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin), the boroughs of Drogheda and Sligo and the towns of Bray and Dundalk into local electoral areas and the number of members of the councils to be assigned to each such area, with a view to ensuring a reasonable relationship between the 2006 population and representation within each local authority. For this purpose, the Committee is to assume no change in the total membership of each local authority and to endeavour, as far as practicable, to achieve variance from individual average local authority representation within the range of + or – 10%.*

2. *In carrying out its review, the Committee shall have as an objective the drawing up of electoral areas which (alone or in combination) would, as far as practicable, have an urban or neighbourhood focal point (or points).*
3. *In recommending changes to local electoral areas, the Committee should, subject to paragraph 2, take due account first of the desirability of preserving natural communities or the hinterlands of population centres, and secondly of the desirability, where it may be possible to do so, of aligning local electoral area boundaries with Dáil constituency boundaries.*
4. *The number of councillors representing an area as determined above should not be less than 4 or more than 7, provided that in very exceptional circumstances 3 seat local electoral areas may be recommended where otherwise the geographic size of the area would be disproportionately large.*
5. *Subject to the above, the Committee shall endeavour to maintain continuity in relation to the arrangement of local electoral areas.*
6. *The Committee shall submit its report as soon as possible and, in any event, not later than 20 June 2008.*

2.3 Membership

The following persons were appointed as members of the Committee:

Niall Callan	former Secretary General, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Chairman)
Deirdre Garvey	Chief Executive Officer, The Wheel
John McCormack	Director of Services, Kilkenny County Council
Ann McGuinness	former Westmeath County Manager
Donal O'Donoghue	former Galway County Manager

3 Working Methods

3.1 General

The Committee stands established as a boundary Committee under Part V of the Local Government Act 1991. A boundary Committee is required, among other things, to:

- be independent in the performance of its functions,
- make its recommendations in the interests of effective and convenient local government,
- consult any local authority concerned and invite submissions from any person concerned.

The Committee observed these statutory requirements.

3.2 Consultation Arrangements

The methods of consultation undertaken by the Committee were:-

- (a) public notice advertisements were placed in early February 2008 (jointly with the Dublin and Cities Committee) in 4 national and 29 local newspapers and in the Irish Language paper *Foinse*. A copy of the notice is at Appendix II.
- (b) a website (www.electoralareacommittees.ie) was established jointly with the Dublin and Cities Committee to publicise and inform in relation to the work of both Committees, to invite submissions and to publish all submissions received.

(c) The Committee wrote directly on 29 January 2008 inviting submissions from the following:

- (i) Members of the Dáil and Seanad
- (ii) the 30 local authorities under the remit of the Committee
- (iii) registered political parties
- (iv) three local authority associations (i.e. the Association of County and City Councils, the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland and the Local Authority Members Association).

Having regard to the limited time available to complete its review, the Committee decided that it would not be in a position to conduct oral hearings in relation to its work.

The closing date for receipt of submissions by whatever means was specified as 14 March 2008.

A total of 153 submissions to the Committee were made by the persons and organisations listed at Appendix III. This is a significantly higher response rate than for earlier reviews of local electoral areas, and one which the Committee regards as a positive indication of interest in the present review. The Committee thanks all those who took the trouble to make submissions; it found this external input most valuable in completing its work.

3.3 Information sought from Local Authority Managers

The terms of reference include the objective of –

“drawing up of electoral areas which (alone or in combination) would as far as practicable, have an urban or neighbourhood focal point (or points)”.

In order to ensure up to date information on local authority developments or plans relevant to this matter, the Committee decided to write on 6 February 2008 to the manager of each local authority under its remit. Managers were requested to indicate, by reference to any major changes in settlement patterns and/or urban or neighbourhood infrastructures since the last review of electoral areas in 1998, as well

as planning and community development objectives currently in force locally, what may properly be regarded as “urban or neighbourhood focal points” within their functional areas. Managers were asked to base their advice on objective considerations, including approved development plans, local area plans or other strategic/policy statements.

Responses to this request were received on behalf of 13 local authority managers. The Committee wishes to record its appreciation of this assistance, which has proved most valuable in assisting with the completion of its work.

3.4 Work of the Committee

In accordance with Part V of the Local Government Act 1991, the Minister provided the Committee with staff to assist it in its work. The Secretariat to the Committee was provided by Martin Vaughan, Assistant Principal, Eoin Bennis, Higher Executive Officer and John Farrell, Clerical Officer. The Committee greatly benefited from the diligent research and high quality support provided by its secretariat; and wishes to record its appreciation of this exceptional assistance.

The Committee also adopted rules of procedure to assist it in its business; a copy of these is set out at Appendix 1.

The Committee held 11 meetings between January and June 2008. One member of the Committee is a serving official with a local authority and was therefore precluded by law from taking any part in the consideration of proposals relating to that authority. The member withdrew from any meetings while the particular local authority was being considered and was not circulated with any working papers in relation to the authority. All matters arising at meetings of the Committee were agreed by consensus, and without the need to use the voting arrangements provided for in our rules of procedure.

