

# 4 General Issues

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## Population Changes

The population of the State increased from 3,626,087 in 1996 to 4,239,848 in 2006, representing an increase of 613,761 or 16.9% in the ten-year period. Population growth has occurred unevenly across the State, with notable variations between, and more particularly within, cities and counties. In the eight areas under the remit of the Committee, the population grew from 1,337,271 in 1996 to 1,477,295 in 2006 – an increase of 140,024 or 10.5%. Of those eight areas, Fingal experienced the most rapid rate of growth, with the population increasing from 167,683 to 239,992 – an increase of 72,309 (43.1%) over the ten-year period. The increase in population in Galway City over the same time period was also well ahead of the national average. However, as is shown in the following Table, the rate of population change in the other areas under the Committee’s remit was lower than the national average, and in the case of one area, the population decreased.

Area	1996 Population	2006 Population	Change	Change %
Fingal	167,683	239,992	72,309	43.1
Galway City	57,241	72,414	15,173	26.5
South Dublin	218,728	246,935	28,207	12.9
Waterford City	42,540	45,748	3,208	7.5
Dublin City	481,854	506,211	24,357	5.1
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	189,999	194,038	4,039	2.1
Limerick City	52,039	52,539	500	1.0
Cork City	127,187	119,418	-7,769	-6.1

Under the Committee’s terms of reference, local electoral area boundary changes are to be determined by reference to population changes within, and not between, the different local authority areas over the period 1996 to 2006. Each local authority area has its own specific pattern of population change. For some city areas, for example Dublin, the largest population increases have occurred in inner-city areas

while in other areas, for example Galway City, these increases have occurred on the outer edges of the city.

Of the population recorded in 2006, over 610,000 persons (14.7%) usually resident in the State were born outside of the State with 440,000 (10.5%) coming from the EU 25 (excluding Ireland). Over 120,000 of the population had migrated to Ireland in the 12-month period preceding the Census. Dublin and the surrounding counties of Kildare, Meath and Wicklow have the majority of non-Irish migrants. In its report on Migration Policy in 2006, the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) stated that –

“Participation in the various levels of the political process is a powerful demonstration of growing integration into the life of a society. Currently, UK citizens in Ireland can vote in all elections other than those to elect the president. EU nationals may vote in European Parliamentary elections and local elections. Non-EEA nationals can vote in local elections. It is important to ensure that people are fully aware of their voting rights and that they are actively encouraged to use the franchise and participate in this vital area of civic life.”

The Committee supports this recommendation of the NESC; we hope that our work will contribute to an active interest across Ireland’s rapidly changing population and society in future local elections.

### **Analysis of terms of reference**

While the terms of reference of the Committee are similar in many respects to those used in previous reviews (see Appendix V), they also contain some additional elements, in particular the requirement to align local electoral area boundaries with Dáil constituency boundaries.

As could reasonably be expected, the Committee found a diversity of conditions and circumstances within the local authority areas under its remit. In practice, the Committee had to weigh and balance the different elements of the terms of reference having regard to the particular situation of each local authority. Where we encountered tension or competition between these different elements in addressing particular issues, we had to resolve this in a practical way, and bearing in mind our statutory duty to act in the interests of effective and convenient local government.

The relative importance we placed on different elements of our terms of reference also varied somewhat depending on local factors and conditions, and having regard to our overriding duty to support effective and convenient local government.

#### Total membership of local authorities

The terms of reference directed the Committee to assume no change in the numbers of councillors to be elected to each local authority. A significant number of the submissions made to us argued that it was anomalous that the population/councillor ratio in the large urban local authorities was many times higher than in less populous counties; and that some addition should therefore be made to the membership of certain large urban local authorities.

The terms of reference did not permit the Committee to consider or recommend on the merits of any such changes in local authority membership. The Committee would also comment that a strict standardisation of representation ratios across local government (as is required for Dáil constituencies) would be difficult given the very different sizes and populations of counties; and that considerations of deliberative and other efficiency will also influence the size of the membership of local authorities.

#### Population and Representation

The Committee was requested to endeavour, as far as practicable, to achieve variances from individual average local authority representation within the range of + or - 10% for each electoral area. This has been achieved in all cases, and in many cases, the electoral area population per member would be very close to the average for the local authority. The Committee, in arriving at its recommendations, has sought in each case to minimise the variation from the local authority average while at the same time taking account of all of the terms of reference.

The largest variations from the local authority average population per member arising from the recommendations of the Committee would occur in Dublin City North (-8.33%) and Dublin City South (-8.04%). In the case of some electoral areas, the desire of the Committee to minimise variations has been balanced by the need to take account of other considerations, including for example, neighbourhood focal points and population trends.

### Urban or neighbourhood focal points

The Committee had the objectives of identifying local electoral areas that alone or in combination would, as far as practicable, have an urban or neighbourhood focal point or points, and subject to that, take due account of the desirability of preserving natural communities or the hinterlands of natural communities.

While the areas under the Committee's remit were mainly urban in character, three of those areas (i.e. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin) also contain extensive rural areas with more dispersed neighbourhood patterns. Factual information provided by local authority managers that identified neighbourhood or focal points (see Chapter 3) was available to the Committee. Many of the submissions received also emphasised the importance of neighbourhoods along with issues relating to the delivery of local authority services (including area-based arrangements operated by some authorities) and how local electoral areas should take-account of those factors. In developing its recommendations, the Committee took account of this information.

### Dáil constituency boundaries

The Committee was required, subject to the objective of identifying electoral areas having an urban or neighbourhood focal point (or points), to take due account of the desirability, where it may be possible to do so, of aligning local electoral area boundaries with Dáil constituency boundaries. This explicit consideration of Dáil constituency boundaries was not required of the last review of the Dublin local authority electoral areas in 1998.

For the purposes of this element of its terms of reference, the Committee considered that it would be sensible to use the prospective Dáil constituency boundaries recommended by the Constituency Commission in its Report on Dáil and European Parliament Constituencies in 2007 rather than those current boundaries that may be subject to revision.

Alignment of local electoral areas with Dáil constituency boundaries is assured in the case of Galway, Limerick and Waterford as all the electoral areas in these cities are contained entirely within a single constituency. The recommendations of the Committee would bring full alignment between electoral areas and Dáil constituencies in the case of Cork City, Dublin City South, and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, and substantially improved alignment in South Dublin. In the case of

Dublin City North and Fingal, the Committee did not find it possible to recommend full alignment with Dáil constituency boundaries, because it considered that this would unduly compromise other elements of its terms of reference and/or its overriding duty to support effective and convenient local government. A more complete explanation of the issues arising in Fingal is set-out in Chapter 5. In spite of such difficulties, the recommendations in all cases seek to maximise alignment between the boundaries of local electoral areas and Dáil constituency boundaries.

A number of submissions argued that the objective of observing neighbourhoods and natural communities should take precedence over the achievement of alignment between the boundaries of electoral areas and Dáil constituency boundaries. The Committee considered these on a case-by-case basis in the light of overall circumstances as indicated above.

#### Number of councillors representing an electoral area

The terms of reference require that local electoral areas recommended by the Committee should not have less than four or more than seven members except that in very exceptional circumstances three member electoral areas may be recommended where otherwise the geographic size of the area would be disproportionately large. Submissions expressed a range of views on the merits of electoral areas of different sizes and the circumstances in which electoral areas of different sizes are appropriate.

Given the higher population densities prevailing in the (generally urbanised) areas within our remit, as well as the relatively compact size of these areas, the Committee did not find any very exceptional circumstances in the course of its work which would have justified our recommending three member local electoral areas.

There were forty-six local electoral areas under the Committee's remit, eight of which at present have three members. The Committee sought to achieve a balance in recommending, within each local authority, electoral areas of different sizes having regard to all of the terms of reference. The recommendations of the Committee would reduce the overall number of electoral areas by four to forty-two; this reduction is because of the discontinuation of the eight three-member electoral areas and an increase of four (i.e. from five at present to nine) in the number of six-member electoral areas. This is also illustrated in Chapter 1.

### Maintaining continuity

The Committee was required to endeavour to maintain continuity in relation to the arrangement of electoral areas. However, change is also required to fulfil other elements of the terms of reference, particularly given the very significant population growth since the previous review of electoral areas. Where the Committee has recommended changes in electoral areas, it has sought as far as possible to maximise continuity with the existing electoral area pattern.