

I wish to make a submission to the review of the Local Electoral Boundary Areas 2019.

I was first elected to Wexford Borough Council in 2004 and subsequently elected to Wexford Borough Council and Wexford County Council (Wexford Electoral Area) in 2009. I was returned at the local elections of 2014 to Wexford Co. Council this time from the Wexford Municipal District Electoral Area.

As an active councillor throughout those years I have found the current arrangement to be a major disadvantage, in particular, to the electorate in urban centres such as Wexford Town.

Wexford Town was one of the 5 former Boroughs prior to the 2014 election. A Council of 12 members representing approximately 20,000 people. Following the 2014 election the number of councillors elected to the Municipal District of Wexford was 10, and of these, just 3 came from the urban area of the Municipal District. This imbalance led to a number of serious difficulties for councillors, officials and the public alike.

As a councillor in this urban centre I have found the workload involved in providing a decent level of representation to the people of the Town and District almost impossible. Rural based councillors, whilst having somewhat of a profile within the urban areas are still perceived to be just that - rural councillors - whose balliwick is defined by their parish or townland.

As a result this does leave them with a much lesser numbers of constituents to deal with on a day to day basis, perhaps running into hundreds, whilst their urban based counterparts are deemed to be the representatives of a Town with a population of 20,000. Whilst there is some crossover, by and large, people see the Local Representative as just that - Local.

The role and function of the Mayor of Wexford has always played a key role in the public's interaction with Local Government, the elected members and officials. The public always held the Office of the Mayor in high regard and as First Citizen the Mayor was regarded as the figurehead of the Town. The creation of the Municipal District has diminished this function of Local Government. At the end of this 5 year term it is predicted that only 1 of the Mayors elected in Wexford will be from the urban area with the remaining 4 from rural parts of the District. This has led to a dilution of the office with the mayor becoming anonymous and irrelevant to large sections of the community.

As well as the deficit in representation there has developed a very definite urban - rural divide in terms of lobbying for works and projects to be carried out within the Municipal District area. Given that the rural part of the Municipal District has a much greater representation this has seen the Town centre area of Wexford suffer greatly in terms of resources such as staffing or funding being shared out.

As such I feel it is imperative that the Municipal District of Wexford be split in 2 under this review to create the largely urban based Wexford Municipal Borough and a new rural electoral area be created to allow for representation outside of this urban area. The office of the Mayor to be elected by members of the new Urban Borough with a new Chair or Cathairleach elected by the rural based councilors.

Best regards

Cllr. George Lawlor