

## **Local Area Boundary Committee – Cork County**

### **Submission by John Jefferies**

I wish to make the following submission to the Boundary Committee with regard to Local Electoral Area representation for the Cobh Local Electoral Area. Prior to 2014, Cobh shared an electoral district with Midleton, Carrigtwohill and surrounding areas. However for the 2014 local elections a completely new LEA was formed. This was given the name Cobh LEA but ranged across a large crescent of territory from Cobh and Carrigtwohill in the South East, straddling the old city boundary over as far as Kerry Pike in the West and almost as far as the outskirts of Mallow in the north. An equally unwieldy LEA was created in the remaining part of South East Cork which was called East Cork.

The Cork City Boundary extension which comes into effect at the 2019 Local Elections will take a significant chunk out of the Cobh LEA as it has been defined since 2014. It will almost cut this LEA in two, dividing the part comprised of Cobh, Carrigtwohill, Glounthaune and Little Island from the other section north of a line from Knockraha to Monard. It would seem to me that in this case the Boundary Committee will have no alternative but to abandon the existing Cobh LEA outline.

It is a well established principle and a central plank of the European Charter of Local Self Government that social and political issues should be dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level that is consistent with their resolution. Thus local government areas should make sense from a democratic /representational point of view as well as from an organisational one. I would therefore propose a new electoral area, to be known as Cobh-Carrigtwohill which would include the District Electoral Divisions of Cobh Urban, Cobh Rural, Carrigtwohill and Knockraha (including Little Island). If required in order to adjust councillor to population ratio, those sections of Rathcooney and Riverstown not being subsumed into the expanded Cork City Council area could be added. Alternate to that would be a return to a Cobh-Midleton area although this has the disadvantage that it leaves the town of Youghal isolated in a corner of South East Cork.

At very least the DEDs of Ballynaglogh, Killeagh, Glenville, Carrignavar, Blackpool and White Church should under no circumstances be part of any electoral district centred on Cobh. Their natural home would be a LEA based around the town of Mallow as they are by nature and identity part of North or Mid Cork, not the Cobh area. To add them to Cobh would be unfair to both the aforementioned districts and to the Cobh area.

The Terms of Reference of the Boundary Committee are rather narrow in their scope. I would like to make the following comments which while outside those Terms of Reference are in my view of some importance:

The abolition of Town Councils in 2014 was one of the most regressive acts taken in relation to local democracy in Ireland since the creation of the local government system under British rule in 1898/99. While these councils had very limited powers, they were vastly better than the Municipal Districts that replaced them.

With respect to Cobh, the old Urban District Council (later Town Council) covered only the immediate area of the town and was represented by councillors elected only by electors in the town on a separate ballot paper to the County Council Election. A significantly lower quota was required to secure election to the Town Council. This contrasts with what is termed the Cobh Municipal District which covers the entire Cobh LEA including districts up to 40km from Cobh. It is anything but municipal. Not directly elected as a separate body, it is no more than a sub-committee of the County Council comprised of the members of that LEA. As far as the citizens of Cobh are concerned most are hardly aware of the Municipal District's existence. A town hall remains but almost all decisions and most queries are referred to County Hall. From my discussions with other Cobh citizens, it is clear that delivery of local services and accessibility of elected members have seriously suffered since the abolition of Cobh Town Council. A disconnect has been created by the abolition of the town council and I am aware of similar concerns in other towns around the country. I would urge the Boundary Committee to call in its report for the re-establishment of a true local government tier for all towns with populations in excess of 2,000 and specifically in this case for the re-establishment of a proper Town Council in Cobh.

Yours sincerely,

**John Jefferies**

1<sup>st</sup> May 2018