

**Local Government Boundaries Commissioner  
for Northern Ireland**

Transcript Details					
		Assistant Commissioner		Mark Orr	
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**Assistant**

**Commissioner**

By way of formal introduction, good morning. My name is Mark Orr and I will now formally open the second day of the public hearing into the proposed Local Government District of Derry and Strabane. I have to record that these proceedings are being recorded so that anyone who speaks knows that a transcript of what they say will be taken. I am independent of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. I have to consider the oral evidence and the documentary evidence already received and I have to prepare a report within four weeks. Copies of all the proposed boundary maps are around here and on the desk. I am not allowed to deal with six specific matters, that is: the number of new Councils; the groupings; the location of headquarters; financial consequences; District Electoral Areas, that is, affecting Westminster constituencies; and city and borough status. There is a programme of speakers and just so that everyone knows, the speakers booked for today so far are only Councillor Durkan and Mr Wright who is a representative of the Ulster Unionist Party and he has indicated that he is going to be here at eleven o'clock. That is really all I have to say. The evidence, as I have indicated, is given from the front here into the microphone so that it can be recorded. Councillor Durkan, thank you for waiting for ten minutes. If you want to come forward and Mr McLaughlin from Sinn Féin is also here. You can sit wherever you like. When you want to speak, just press the button and if you would just identify yourself first.

**Mark Durkan**

Thank you, Mark. I am Councillor Mark H. Durkan of the SDLP on Derry City Council. It is our proposal that the new Council should be entitled Derry City and Strabane Regional Council. This name we believe will preserve the identities of both existing Councils and obviously the constituents within those Councils. We believe it is essential that, as the fourth largest city on the island, Derry City is a constituent component of the new name or any new name. Also, the inclusion of Strabane in the title is essential for the inclusion of the inhabitants of Strabane and its environs. I believe the word regional will also envelope the many outlying wards that are going to exist and the amalgamation of Derry City and Strabane District Council. Furthermore, the word regional may go some way to adding a degree of gravitas towards the new Council. Derry City

Council is currently the second largest council in the North; however post-Review of Public Administration, I think we are looking at ourselves and Strabane being one of the smallest of the eleven super-councils. I believe our proposal, Derry City and Strabane Regional Council, avoids the anonymity and blandness that a proposal such as North West Regional Council conjures up. Furthermore the christening of a new Council as North West Regional Council could be argued as being offensive to Nationalists, as the Council will not incorporate the North West of the Island rather than the North West of Northern Ireland. Fosta ba mhaith linn comhaitheantas a thabhairt ar an [t-]ainm Gaeilge don chomhairle nua Also, we would like recognition for the Irish name for the new council. We would like the incorporation or elevation if you like of an Irish language element within the name and give the Irish title of the new Council similar status where it appears.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

I have very limited Irish, but I got that.

**Mark Durkan**

That is about that; there is not an awful lot more we can go into.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Your party's submission said that there were no issues with boundaries or no issues with wards in the present Derry Council area. I take it that is still the position?

**Mark Durkan**

Yes, that is the position. I am aware my colleagues in Strabane have a different view towards the wards in the current Strabane District Council and how they will be affected by the amalgamation, but as regards to the wards in Derry City Council area we are happy enough with that.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

There is no issue. I have no questions. Does that conclude what you want to say? Mr McLaughlin do you have any questions?

**Brian  
McLaughlin**

Brian McLaughlin from Sinn Fein. I have no questions or comments. Thank you.

**Assistant Commissioner** Thank you very much Councillor Durkan. We have not kept you too long.

**Mark Durkan** Thank you.

**Assistant Commissioner** It is now ten-twenty am, the submissions of Councillor Durkan have concluded and I am now going to adjourn the enquiry until eleven o'clock when we are informed that Mr Wright from the Unionist Party will speak.

#### ADJOURNMENT

**Assistant Commissioner** It is now eleven o'clock and I am resuming the enquiry. Mr Wright from the Ulster Unionist Party is here. Mr McLaughlin of Sinn Fein is also present and I now propose to resume and hear the submission of Mr Wright. Mr Wright, if you would just identify yourself and make your submission please.

**Terry Wright** Good morning, Terry Wright. I am a Chairman of the Foyle Union Association, in which capacity I am mainly here this morning, but I am also Deputy Chairman of the Ulster Unionist Party.

**Assistant Commissioner** Do you have a submission you wish to read then, Mr Wright, or a statement you wish to make?

**Terry Wright** Well, I have a submission, some of which I will read and some of which I will refer to. Can I just say at the outset I welcome the opportunity to be able to attend this morning? I gather that initially there were arrangements made for yesterday, but as you probably heard on the news there was a fairly important meeting in Belfast last night, so I appreciate the opportunity to come here this morning. I will not be speaking directly to the party's submission. I gather you have a copy of it and I think it would be wasting your time.

**Assistant Commissioner** We have a full copy of all the parties' submissions.

**Terry Wright** I understand. So basically what I am here to do this morning is

to speak to a couple of local issues which arise from the considerations that you are presently engaged in. I tend to be fairly concise and economic with words. I am sure you will be pleased to hear that. However, if you want any elaboration on the points that I want to make, I would be happy to try and deal with the questions as they arise. I am here really from a local perspective this morning and there are three issues that I would like to address with the Commission, all of which are inter-related. One is the name of the new Council. The second one is the situation of minority rights and governance of minorities and can I say at the outset, in the interests of natural justice and as a committed democrat what I would be arguing in terms of governance and the protection of minority rights, I would be arguing the same case regardless of party labels. That is very much the position of the party and it is one which I support and am happy to endorse, so whilst I speak very much in the context of the City here this morning, in the interests of natural justice there is a principal here which informs what I say and it applies across the political divide in the country. The third issue that I would like to address and they are all inter-connected is the issue of Castlederg. I am sure you have had representations from the Unionist Party that have probably argued a line different to the one that I will be taking this morning, but that just proves that the Unionist Party is a fairly broad church. If I could address the first issue, which is the name of the Council. As a Unionist and someone who has grown up in the City and sees the City very much as part of my cultural heritage, I would be arguing for the retention of the name Londonderry. Having witnessed the effects of the change of the Council's name from Londonderry to Derry City Council and the impact that that has had on community relations, which in my view have actually held back the social economic development of the City, I think the Commission has an opportunity here to be creative and perhaps put in place a name which is agreed by all and may bring people together rather than push them apart. So whilst in terms of my politics and heritage I would argue for the name Londonderry, I do recognise that there are people in the City who would have problems with that name, in the same way in which the Unionist population has problems with the name of Derry City Council. I recognise and indeed have had discussions with members of the other political parties of their difficulties with the name Londonderry. Whilst it might not be your role to seek to amend community relations, I think you must be conscious

of the impact and the effect of decisions which you may recommend. If I could just talk a little bit about the situation in the City. As I have said, I have lived here most of my life apart from a few years in Belfast. I am Vice-Principal of a local secondary school with 850 mixed young people in the school. Whilst there are many, many young people who are not interested in politics, there are many of those who have fallen victim to the influence of paramilitary associations in the City and that has helped to create sectarian attitudes which I, as a Unionist, could not endorse. It has helped to create sectarian attitudes and feelings of alienation, which in my view have held the development of the City back and I think that is all too evident in the economic state of the City at the moment. I have had children from my own family who have gone to schools in the City and they have had friends from right across the community, but there is a certain group, who I might want to call marginalized, disaffected - I think you have to be careful of the language we use - but I have never seen such hard sectarian attitudes as come through from certain elements of young people in the City at the moment and it manifests itself in many ways. A reluctance, for example, to share in the current thinking of the Department of Education and encouraging educational communities and the rationalisation of courses. There are difficulties in persuading some young people to go to courses and schools which they do not identify as being part of their background or their culture. To my mind, a lot of that flows from the situation in the City and we cannot trace it all back to the name change in the Council, but it is a divisive issue. In October 2002 the Church of Ireland Bishop, Kenneth Good, reported and warned about the feeling of alienation and insecurity in the City being experienced by the proportion of the population drawn mainly from the Unionist community. Around the same time, John Reid, who was at that time Secretary of State for Northern Ireland talked of the province being a chilly place for Unionists. Yes, there have been political developments, but they have been stop-start and on the ground the situation has perhaps not gone as far as politicians would like us to believe they have. The political reality of the Unionists' experience in Londonderry is a feeling of being frozen out and disenfranchised by those who exercise power in the City. The irony is of course, that those who exercise that power campaigned for this very thing in the late 1960s. And this continuous argument about the name of the City is not

healthy, it is not productive and in my view it deepens the gulf that exists between different groups within the community. It is not an issue for everybody, but it is an issue for some and it has a negative impact on the development of the City. Academic study is being undertaken by some of the community groups and their research witnesses to the problems that lie within. Many young people from the Unionist community and I have to say in some cases, my own family, continue to feel a sense of intimidation about crossing the bridge and coming into the City at certain times for leisure purposes and as I have pointed out to access educational opportunities. They paint a telling picture of a city in which they have come to regard certain areas as no-go areas. It was not an experience I had as a young person, because I was born and grew up on the Foyle Road which was a very, very mixed community. Such experiences would not have been part of my development as a young person and as a Unionist committed to a pluralist Northern Ireland and committed to trying to attract people from right across the community to the Unionist Party. It is not something that I welcome and wish to see, in fact I would like to see it addressed. It takes me back to the point that whilst that might not be part of the remit of this Commission, it needs to be very much aware of the impact of decisions it may recommend. I could go on but I think I have made the point. So not without some understanding, Unionists feel little sense of association with the City where they have to seek permission to express their culture. They have to seek permission to march on the streets and where they feel they cannot freely access educational and social opportunities and where development is less than even-handed and where their perception is that council leaders are actually governing over the dysfunction of the community. I feel therefore that the name is crucial; as I say I would be happy to elaborate on it if you wish me to but I think the point is well and strongly made and I hope adequately. Whilst I argue for Londonderry, I could see the value in avoiding both Londonderry and Derry City Council and in the possible links that we may have with Strabane and Castlederg. Foyle and Derg might be a name that the Commission could consider and feel happy to recommend. So whilst our position is to recommend Londonderry, we do understand the value in not imposing it on a community that might feel the same sense of alienation that many of the Unionist population feel as a result of the

name that was made in the Council a number of years ago. I do not want to labour the point. I hope it is well made and I will be happy to deal with any questions that you might have. The other issue which I would like to address is the one of the Castlederg area. A representative from West Tyrone has probably taken a different line to myself, but I am here to argue the situation from the perspective of Foyle, not just from the Unionists' view point but from the whole of the community. Whilst I don't like indulging in sectarian head count and number-crunching, I have to recognise that people in the community at the present time do tend to vote along communal or I might want to call it sectarian lines. It is regrettable but that is the case. I therefore have a concern if the Castlederg area, which is presently included as I understand in the recommendation for Castlederg/Strabane and the City, is taken out and removed from that area it could place Unionists left in the remaining area in a position where they would fall below the level which is set to protect minority rights. In the interests of natural justice I would be arguing the same point were it Nationalists/Republicans experiencing the same situation in other areas. Indeed that may well be the case. I have spoken about this with the hierarchy of the party and they certainly endorse the line that I am taking here today. So I would be arguing for the retention of Castlederg with Strabane and Foyle and it would be appropriate as those rivers are tributaries to Foyle. Would there not be a unifying symbolic notion sent out there of everybody flowing in and moving in the one direction, which is what this City needs? If you have been here any length of time you will see the state of the City centre. It needs renewal and it needs revitalisation so we need the community working together for minority rights in terms of governance in this City and I have referred to what the current experience is and I believe to be the case. That will be exacerbated further and people will not feel that they can identify with the new Council and I would take the view that it is all important that that it is the case. So these are two inter-connected issues and indeed the third one, and I am going to risk being repetitive here, is the problem of governance. I am not making a party political point here. It is a political point and I do not expect you to respond to it, or perhaps even note it, but I believe that there is poor quality representation by those who represent the Unionist community. I suppose as an Ulster Unionist you would expect me to say that, but the impact of that is that many of the



broad Unionist population feel disenfranchised and therefore the issue of governance is crucial. It can either unite or can further divide this community. I would be recommending that the Commission be looking to do the former, to unite rather than to keep divided. So I am sorry if I have seemed slightly repetitive, but I know that all three issues are inter-connected and I have attempted to deal with them in what I believe is a fair, balanced way. I can see the value of the name of the new Council being Foyle and Derg. That would require the retention of the Castlederg area which I believe is important for the reasons which I have outlined and that links to the issue of governance, which from the Unionist perspective is vital to the revitalisation of the City. Thank you.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

I think I have one question. There are six rules, you probably know this, that I have to have regard to and one of those is the desirability that there should be a proper representation of the rural and urban electorate within the District. Is it under that heading that you would urge that Castlederg and the three wards in the Castlederg area should remain in this proposed Council District?

**Terry Wright**

That is an argument that could be put and I would support that but as I have very much focused on here this morning, I am coming very much from the situation on Foyle and I believe that if we can address the situation on Foyle it will have an impact for the whole environ around the City, not least across the border, as well as Strabane and Castlederg. Those are areas which are themselves very close to the border and we very much support the notion of regional development in this area. I live in Eglinton which is a rural community. I am aware of the rural issues outside the village and I have no problem and indeed would welcome the situation that you refer to.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

I have no further questions. Mr McLaughlin, have you any questions for Mr Wright or any observations? If you would come up as you have already identified yourself.

**Brian  
McLaughlin**

Brian McLaughlin of Sinn Fein. It is just an observation about the proposed name change by Terry of the Ulster Unionist

party. I think it is very vague and I will firstly deal with the Derg and Foyle suggestion. People from Derry will have a local identity of being from Derry and people from Strabane will have a local identity of being from Strabane and associate it with that, so the fact that Derry and Strabane would not be named in that I do not think would be acceptable to either parties. I think it is a sense of belonging as well which is very important, so the core words of Derry and Strabane should be incorporated in any name. I think it crosses all the T's and dots the I's, so to speak. The issue of Londonderry, we respect anybody's right to use the name Londonderry, but a motion had been passed that Derry City Council be changed to the name Derry. That was passed and I just want to make a note on that. Regarding the equality issue in the town, I think Sinn Fein have been working very hard over many years with their outreach programme to address this issue and they treat everybody equally, regardless of religion, colour or creed or anything else. I myself work with people from the Unionist background, socialise with them, have Unionist friends and I would not like to think that they feel alienated in our city. It is something that we are working on and trying hard to address and deal with. Thank you.

**Terry Wright** Am I allowed to respond?

**Assistant Commissioner** If you can just give me a second, Mr Wright. Mr McLaughlin, we got a submission in writing from a Mr Eric McGinley from Sinn Fein. Does that name ring a bell? The front page of it has four bullet points and the second bullet point is this and I will just read it to you "we strongly support the incorporation of the core words Derry and Strabane in the name of the new Council." I take it that is your point.

**Brian McLaughlin** That is my point, yes.

**Assistant Commissioner** Mr Wright, sorry.

**Terry Wright** I am not going to get involved in a political argument here. I believe the case that I have made is well made and I regret to say Mr McLaughlin the points he has made are very indicative of the case that I had presented this morning. I do

not wish to talk directly but I think you need to talk to more Unionists. You have not listened to what I have said and you have not listened to the commitment I have for the City and the commitment that I want to see the young people committing to the City. There is a gulf and you are going to deepen the gulf. I think the attacks on the Apprentice Boys' Hall, the problems that we have in interface areas both on the Waterside and in the City, I think the evidence is there. If you chose to reject it, then the City is not going to make progress and you cannot airbrush your history, much as you might wish to.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

We had Mr Campbell and Councillor Begley yesterday and I think they just agreed to disagree and I think maybe you and Mr McLaughlin are going to do the same maybe.

**Terry Wright**

As I say I am not going to get involved in a political point-scoring exercise. I have come to make a case and I believe it is a strong case. I believe there is a moral as well as a political imperative and as I say, whilst this might not be the remit of the Commission, I think you must be aware of the implications of the decisions that you will make.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Thank you Mr Wright. Mr McLaughlin, are you content you have had a chance to make your submission?

**Brian  
McLaughlin**

Yes. Thank you.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

There being nobody else here I am not quite sure whether to adjourn or close. I think we will adjourn just for a few moments and see whether we are going to close the enquiry or not. Thank you both for your attendance and thank you very much for your contributions. If you have any documents you wish me to have I can receive them.

**Terry Wright**

No, I have nothing I wish to add to what I have already said. The party has already submitted and I just came forward to elaborate on those points this morning. Thank you for the opportunity.

## ADJOURNMENT

**Assistant**

**Commissioner** It is now one forty-five pm on Friday 21 November 2008. No-one has turned up for the afternoon session except Mr McNutt from Sinn Fein, who has indicated that he is here as an observer. There being no-one else present to make submissions I now close the enquiry.

**ENDS**

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