Report of the Athlone Boundary Review Committee

3 November 2016
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Executive Summary

The Athlone Boundary Committee was established by Mr Alan Kelly, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, under section 28 of the Local Government Act on 19th June 2015. The Committee was reconstituted on the 20th October 2015 and its substantial work commenced after that date. It was tasked with carrying out a review of the boundary between County Westmeath and County Roscommon, make recommendations with respect to the Municipal District of Athlone that it considers to be necessary in the interests of effective and convenient local government and prepare a report with recommendations to the Minister. The terms of reference identified a number of matters to be considered in formulating the recommendations. This report is the culmination of the efforts of the Committee to fulfil its brief.

The Committee engaged in an extensive consultation process as part of its work. It engaged with both local authorities on a number of occasions. 27,949 submissions were received and analysed following a call for input from the public and interested parties. Substantive submissions were received from a number of bodies and, in particular, from both local authorities. A number of meetings took place with some national stakeholders whose future activities could be affected by the outcome of the process. The Committee also examined good practice internationally and drew on the expertise of its own members and on the knowledge and experience of the Institute of Public Administration, which also provided professional support. Administrative support was provided by Westmeath County Council staff, who also participated in a Liaison and Support Group along with Roscommon County Council staff. A customised website was established to assist the process.

Having considered all of the issues in the context of the terms of reference, the Committee recommends that no change to the existing boundary should take place. It recommends that a new programme of structured cooperation be immediately initiated by both local authorities to develop an innovative governance system for Athlone–Monksland/Bellanamullia. This should build on existing cooperation between the authorities and focus on the development of an agreed vision for the area, a joint Local Area Plan for Athlone – Monksland/Bellanamullia, a joint retail strategy, the possible expansion of shared services, the further development of the identity of Athlone and other matters.

In making these recommendations the Committee acknowledges the advantages that would result in a change of boundary. It also acknowledges the strength of opposition from the citizens of Roscommon to any such boundary change. It further recommends that if substantial progress is not made on the issues mentioned above within defined time frames that the Minister should extend the boundary at a future date. The details of such an extension should be finalised at that stage following consideration of progress made by the individual local authorities in advancing the above recommendations.
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Establishment and Membership of the Committee

Mr. Alan Kelly, T.D., Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, appointed a statutory Committee on the 19 of June 2015 to review the administrative boundary between County Westmeath and County Roscommon; one of four such reviews. Under Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1991, the Committee was asked to:

a) carry out a review of the boundary between County Westmeath and County Roscommon;
b) make such recommendations with respect to that boundary, and any consequential recommendations with respect to the area of the Metropolitan District of Athlone, that it considers to be necessary in the interests of effective and convenient local government; and
c) prepare and furnish to the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, a report in writing of that review and its recommendations

The Committee is independent in the performance of its functions and the terms of reference clearly set out the basis upon which the Committee’s recommendations were to be drawn and the scope of the Report that follows. The full terms of reference for the Committee are set out in Annex 1.

The Committee was chaired by Mr. Jack Keyes. The original other members were Mr. Joe Allen and Mr. Ciaran Lynch. In September 2015, for reasons unrelated to the work of the Committee, Mr. Allen and Mr. Lynch withdrew, and the Committee’s work was suspended pending the appointment of replacements. Mr. Donal Enright and Mr. Ger Sheeran were appointed in October 2015 and the work of the Committee recommenced. The same membership formed the Drogheda Boundary Committee. Reviews of Waterford city and Carlow town boundaries are being conducted by a separate Committee under the chairmanship of Mr. David O’Connor.

1.2 The Work of the Committee

The Committee progressed its work through a number of methods.

1.2.1 Meetings of the Committee

During the course of its work the Committee in its current formation met formally on 24 occasions, including joint meetings with the Carlow/Waterford Committee and meetings attended by the liaison and support group.

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1 Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government press release on appointment of the Committee.
1.2.2 Liaison and Support Group

A Liaison and Support Group was established to facilitate effective co-ordination and communication between the Committee, both Councils and the Secretariat. The members of this group, in addition to the Committee, were Fiona Ní Chuinn (Roscommon County Council), Pat Keating (Westmeath County Council), Lourda Giles (Westmeath County Council/Secretariat) and Angelo McNeive (Institute of Public Administration).

1.2.3 Secretariat

Westmeath County Council was requested by the Department to perform a secretariat function on behalf of the Committee. The secretariat role would involve servicing of meetings, e.g. minutes, preparation of documentation, etc., and carrying out any ad hoc research as necessary at the request of the Committees.

With the kind assistance of Fingal County Council, an online document management system (Alfresco) was implemented for the respective Boundary Review Committees/Liaison and Support Groups. Given the volume of documentation received and generated for each review, this greatly facilitated the administration and work of the Committees.

1.2.4 Joint Committee Meetings

As noted in section 1.1 above, a separate Committee—with a separate membership and chaired by Mr. David O’Connor—was appointed to review local authority boundaries in Waterford and Carlow. There has been a high level of co-operation between the Boundary Review Committees. They met jointly on 7 occasions for the purpose of establishing a substantially common framework approach to the reviews, to share learning across all reviews and to conduct joint consultations with a number of national stakeholder organisations.

1.2.5 Evaluation Framework

The respective Boundary Committees jointly developed an Evaluation Framework, based on their terms of reference, to ensure a level of consistency and efficiency across all four reviews. The Framework addressed the requirements of the Committees with regard to: necessary contextual and background information, a detailed evidence base from the respective local authorities to inform the Committees’ deliberations, and a method for conducting public consultations.

A substantial volume of background documentation was provided by both local authorities in hardcopy and/or soft copy. The Committee acknowledges both Councils’ support in providing the Committee members with this important information.

Both local authorities supplied background information and data as requested by the Committee in support of their evaluation framework and the criteria that the Committee was asked to have regard to under its terms of reference (see section 5.1 and Appendix 1). An outline of the detailed information and data that constituted this evaluation framework
is provided in Appendix 3. This was provided to the Councils to assist in the preparation of their submissions to the Committee.

The Boundary Committees agreed to use a standard approach to the public consultation process across the four reviews.

1.2.6 Extensions of Timeframe

The timeframe for conduct of the review has extended significantly. Initially, an extension was required in order to re-constitute the Committee membership. Subsequently, following the period for public submissions, it became clear that the volume of submissions received would place a significant administrative burden on the Secretariat and IT resources in the first instance. It was also evident that review and consideration of submissions by the Committee, in addition to the other consultation activities described in Section 2 below, would be a substantial block of work. As a result, the Committee requested the Minister for a further extension to ensure appropriate consideration of all the submissions received. The Committee acknowledges that it took longer than anticipated to complete their report. The Committee wish to acknowledge the support of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (formerly the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government), Councils, public and stakeholders in this regard.

1.3 Acknowledgements

The Boundary Committee would like to thank the elected members, the chief executives, management teams and staff of both local authorities for their assistance with the Committee’s work. In particular, the Committee wish to acknowledge the extensive administrative and technical support provided by Pat Keating, Lourda Giles, Fiona Ní Chuinn and their colleagues.

The number of submissions received placed a substantial administrative burden on the Secretariat provided by Westmeath County Council. The Committee wishes to express its appreciation for the professionalism and commitment of management and staff in supporting its work.

The Committee wishes to acknowledge the assistance received from officials of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. It would also like to thank the members of the public, organisations and public representatives who made submissions to the Committee. The Committee also acknowledges the significant work put into submissions received from both councils and the respective local representatives. The contributions to the consultation process from national stakeholder organisations are also appreciated.

The Committee would also like to thank the Institute of Public Administration for their support and, in particular, Angelo McNeive, Mark Callanan and Richard Boyle, who provided research support for the Committee. Lastly, the Committee is grateful to Fingal County Council. Its Head of IT, Dominic Byrne, and his team greatly facilitated the respective work of all four Boundary Committees by providing an online repository and ongoing support. The
Committee also thanks Waterford City and County Council, who prepared the website template.
Chapter 2 Consultation Process

2.1 Overview of Consultations Undertaken by the Committee

The Committee has consulted extensively in order to develop a comprehensive view of existing local government arrangements and the appropriateness or otherwise of any change. In conducting the consultation process, the Committee sought the views of the general public, elected members and executives of the respective local authorities, and relevant public bodies.

The review process generated a significant level of public interest. This was reflected in the volume of submissions received, in particular from individual members of the public. The approach taken to wider public consultation is dealt with separately in Chapter 3 below – the remainder of this section deals with the Committee’s consultations with the local authorities concerned and national public bodies.

With the assistance of the Liaison and Support Group, the Committee conducted two site visits across the whole Athlone urban area, prior to and following the change of Committee membership. This afforded the Committee the opportunity to orientate themselves with the assistance of Council staff from key functions in both authorities. As a result, the Committee was well placed to define its Area of Interest and develop its understanding of key issues and opportunities in the area.

2.2 Consultation with the Local Authorities

Two separate meetings were held with respective delegations of elected members from Roscommon County Council and Westmeath County Council. The first of these meetings with both Councils, in December 2015, prior to the closure of the public consultation process, enabled the Committee to develop an oversight of the important issues arising in and for each county from the perspective of the elected members. The second of these meetings, in May and June 2016, afforded the elected members the opportunity to offer a considered response to the submissions received by the Committee and to further elaborate their views. The Committee found these meetings particularly helpful in clarifying a range of issues raised and appreciated the constructive engagement of members in the process.

The Committee also met with the Chief Executives and staff from both local authorities. Based on their review of the background documentation and submissions received, the Committee engaged with both authorities to clarify a variety of issues and seek further information/analysis. The information received has been valuable to the Committee’s deliberations.

2.3 Consultation with the Business Community in the Area of Interest

The Committee met with a group of senior executives representing 5 major enterprises employing in excess of 750 people, substantially in pharmaceutical industries, in the Monksland-Bellanamullia area during the period for public submissions.
2.4 Consultation with Relevant Public Bodies

The final component of the consultation process was to engage with a cross-section of relevant public bodies as national stakeholders. The Joint Committees met Transport Infrastructure Ireland, IDA, the Regional Assemblies, Irish Water, and the Planning Division of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. These meetings assisted the Committees by providing a national, strategic perspective on a number of the issues emerging from the other consultations.

The detailed consultation process engaged in has helped the Committee identify the objectives and challenges that its recommendations address.
Chapter 3 Outcome of Consultations

3.1 Submissions Process

3.1.1 Area of Interest

In order to facilitate data gathering for the evaluation framework, undertake analysis, conduct the public consultation process and assess alternatives, it was essential to set some indicative limits to the area under consideration along the existing boundary. Therefore, the Committee identified an ‘Area of Interest,’ presented in Figure 1 below. The Area of Interest did not represent a proposal for a new boundary, and it was open to the Committee to include some of the Area of Interest, all of the Area of Interest, or more than the Area of Interest in the event of a recommendation to extend the boundary.

Figure 1: Athlone Boundary Review Area of Interest

3.1.2 Boundary Review Website

For each boundary review, a stand-alone website was developed and hosted by the Council providing secretariat support. The Committee wish to thank Waterford City and County Council and the IT Section of Westmeath County Council for their assistance in this regard. The website provided important background information, including a statement from the

2 For additional maps in relation to the Area of Interest visit www.athloneboundaryreview.ie/Maps/

3 www.athloneboundaryreview.ie
Chairman, the terms of reference, biographies of the Committee members, press releases and a map of the Area of Interest. It also gave guidance on making a submission by way of a standard set of questions across all 4 reviews derived from the terms of reference and offered the option to make submissions electronically if individuals and organisations so wished.

3.1.3 Notifications

As required by section 33(4) of the Local Government Act 1991, a formal Public Notice inviting submissions was published on 1 December 2015 in the local press and online (see Appendix 2). The period for receipt of submissions closed on 27 January 2016.

3.2 Overview of Public Submissions

3.2.1 Numbers and Format

A total of 27,949 submissions were recorded by the deadline of 27 January 2016. Late submissions have not been included. 5,061 submissions were received electronically. The remainder were received in hard copy.

Submissions were received from a cross-section of the community, including the general public, residents’ associations, schools, community groups, political representatives and political parties, public bodies, businesses and the business community and sporting organisations.

Excluding the submission from Westmeath County Council, just two of the submissions argued in favour of boundary change. The remainder were not in favour. Some research from the United States suggests that opponents of a boundary change are more likely to become involved in the consultative process surrounding that change than supporters\(^4\). Notwithstanding this, the volume of public submissions, and the extent to which they opposed a proposed boundary extension into county Roscommon, were significant.

A limited number of templates, and variations on same, were submitted, resulting in many of the submissions using identical or near-identical wording and format – these templated submissions, which are referred to in this report as ‘standard format submissions’, comprised approximately 97% of submissions received, all of which argued against any change to the boundary.

3.2.2 Processing and Data Protection

All submissions received, along with the name of the individual or organization, are publicly available on the Athlone Boundary Review website, which will continue to act as a public repository and record.

Every submission in every category—electronic, hard copy individual submission or hard copy standard format submissions—was individually registered. Each submission was associated with an individual name, but the address associated with an individual was withheld from publication in each case in compliance with Data Protection legislation. However, all information, including names and associated addresses submitted was available to the Boundary Review Committee. Both Roscommon County Council and Westmeath County Council made submissions, as requested by the Committee.  

The Committee has considered all of the submissions received in its deliberations. Particular attention was given by the Committee to the substantial submissions from the two local authorities, both in their own right and as they encapsulated many of the issues raised in the other submissions.

3.3 Summary of Main Issues Raised in Public Submissions

The following summarises the public submissions and the main points made in favour or against boundary change. The submissions in full can be viewed at www.athloneboundaryreview.ie.

3.3.1 Issues Raised by Those Opposed to Boundary Change

A common theme was the impact a boundary change would have on Roscommon people’s sense of identity, either specifically as residents of the Area of Interest or as Roscommon people (currently living in the county or of Roscommon descent) generally. Roscommon identity was seen as a generational issue impacting not only on an individual but on children and older relatives.

There was also a concern that a boundary change would negatively impact on sporting and cultural organisations and community groups, both in the Area of Interest and across Roscommon as a whole. In many cases sport and the identity of Roscommon or South Roscommon people were linked.

A view common to a number of submissions was that boundary change would have a detrimental impact on the economic performance and social cohesion of Roscommon as a whole. As the Area of Interest accounts for a large proportion of the county’s rates base, concerns were raised that a change would increase the funding burden on Roscommon County Council, resulting in higher commercial rates and/or local property tax. This would have potential knock-on implications in disincetivising inward investment and population growth, reduced access to funding programmes, risk to existing services (e.g. healthcare facilities in the area), restricting rural development and reducing the viability/effectiveness of clubs and sporting organisations. In addition, Monksland/Bellanamullia is now seen as the focal point for people in South Roscommon.

Roscommon County Council and Westmeath County Council submissions are available at www.athloneboundaryreview.ie as submissions SUB3309, SUB748 and SUB406.
Some suggested that if a boundary change was to take place it should reverse the 1898 extension of Westmeath across the Shannon and revert to using the River Shannon as the natural boundary between counties Westmeath and Roscommon. It was also argued that a boundary change would impact a range of other administrative structures, including religious, sporting and other government administrative boundaries and would run contrary to government policy in *Putting People First, the Action Programme for Effective Local Government*. Some of the submissions also highlighted a number of implications for political representation and the provision of education in the area. A number of submissions suggested that a boundary change would have a number of negative impacts for businesses in the area.

Many people expressed the view that the area has undergone significant improvement—economically, socially and culturally—as a result of strategic investment by Roscommon in infrastructure and facilities over an extended period. There was a view that the area that constitutes part of Westmeath west of the Shannon had in comparison been neglected, both relative to the Monksland/Bellanamullia area and to the greater part of Athlone east of the Shannon. A submission from a major employer in the pharmaceutical industry praised the experience and track record of Roscommon County Council in providing support and further stated that its decision to invest might not have proceeded had Roscommon County Council not been the relevant authority.

The nature of the review process itself was raised as a concern in many submissions. For example, many characterised any prospective boundary change as an annexation of a part of County Roscommon by Westmeath County Council. How any decision should be made was a particular concern, with many suggesting that the current process is not democratic and that any decision should be made by referendum. Others expressed the view that the public consultation process was insufficient or that the process lacked objectivity and transparency.

Existing arrangements were considered to be satisfactory; there was a view that high levels of co-operation exist between the two local authorities, as evidenced by a thriving community in the area. Related to this point, respondents questioned the rationale or basis for the review and proposed that effective and convenient local government could be achieved through simple cooperation between the Councils. It was also argued that the success of Athlone does not depend on any boundary change that extends the area of Westmeath.

### 3.3.2 Issues Raised by Respondents in Favour of Boundary Change

Given the small number of submissions received in favour of a boundary change it is not possible to set out as wide a range of arguments as above. However, a number of issues were raised. Among the points highlighted was the requirement under the current boundary arrangements for residents in the area of interest to access local government services such as motor tax in Roscommon town, rather than more conveniently accessing services in Athlone. It was argued that residents in the Area of Interest enjoy a range of services and amenities provided in Westmeath, including schools. The rationale of having the current boundary running through a highly populated area was also questioned.
3.4 Summary of Council Submissions

Both Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils provided substantial submissions setting out their views. The following is a brief summary of the arguments made. It is not intended to be an exhaustive repetition of the full submissions, which are available on the boundary review website. The Committee has given serious consideration to the perspectives offered by both Councils and acknowledges the considerable effort put into their preparation.

3.4.1 Westmeath County Council Submission

Westmeath’s submission set out the importance of Athlone as a regional centre, a critical part of the Midland Gateway and an economic driver for the Midland region. Economic development of the Midland Gateway, including Athlone, is key to addressing the relative underperformance of the Midland Region. The Council argues that achievement of the objectives of current Government policy, as set out in *Putting People First—Action Programme for Effective Local Government* (2012), requires an integrated local government entity for the whole town of Athlone.

Economic growth of the region depends on investment and a critical mass of population and economic activity for which a single administrative authority is essential. Current arrangements result in the anomaly that businesses considering investing in Athlone must liaise with two IDA/Enterprise Ireland regions and two Local Enterprise Offices. A boundary extension would reflect the current reality that Athlone does not stop at the current boundary, thus facilitating integrated planning, presenting a coherent offer to attract investment and maximising regional development. Businesses in the Area of Interest (AOI) would benefit from significant savings on rates and development contributions, enhancing the attractiveness of the Area for investment.

The current boundary is an administrative boundary for local government purposes, independent of other religious and sporting bodies. Integration of community groups from the AOI, which likely have similar interests and concerns to the rest of Athlone, would be supported by the Council and a very active Public Participation Network (PPN). A boundary change would simply recognise that all residents of Athlone should have a voice in how the town is governed and be able to access services through a single entity.

The significant local government infrastructure in Athlone and the wide range of services offered locally offers greater convenience. In 2014, approximately 28% of Athlone Library’s membership was from County Roscommon, over a third of whom were living in the AOI. Library visits from Roscommon schools accounted for 24% of all school visits in the same year. This contrasts with a range of other services currently available to residents of Athlone, County Westmeath, and not available to those in Athlone, County Roscommon. These include motor tax, planning and housing services which are otherwise provided in Roscommon Town. A boundary change would therefore allow the Athlone Municipal District to develop service delivery plans for the integrated entity. Local representation on the Municipal District would provide residents in the AOI with a direct say in the town where many work, shop, access education and socialise. The Council members highlighted their
commitment to quality of services within any extended area. The submission argued that an extension of the boundary would lead to more efficient service delivery in the Athlone Municipal District. In addition, existing services in West Athlone would be extended at minimal net cost to address the needs of the additional c. 4,000 residents.

Current development planning addresses the needs of four-fifths of the town. A boundary extension would allow for a single, integrated plan for Athlone and its environs while also addressing an anomaly in relation to regional planning. The new Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly will develop a Regional Economic & Spatial Strategy (RESS), with the Midlands as a Strategic Planning Area. However, the area of Athlone west of the current boundary lies outside the Gateway designation. It is on the periphery of the Western Regional Planning Guidelines and within the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Area. Similar anomalies exist with regard to economic and community development with the differing Local Community Development Committees (LCDC), Local Economic and Community Plans (LECP) and Local Enterprises Offices (LEO). The response to housing needs is also fragmented, with two separate Housing Strategies and two separate local authorities providing services from Athlone Civic Centre and Roscommon Town respectively.

With regard to representation, the submission argued that Athlone Municipal District should include all the residents of Athlone. Current arrangements are confusing to many, leading to frequent communications from residents within the AOI to which elected members can only respond by referring the resident to Roscommon County Council.

Westmeath Council considered enhanced cooperation to be a sub-optimal alternative to a boundary extension, as it depends on the ongoing support of elected members and the executive of both local authorities. It argued that such an approach would put each county’s representatives in an invidious position when considering any proposal that might be seen as to the detriment of their own county. The Council emphasised that their intention in supporting a boundary extension was not to “take over or commandeering territory from Roscommon County Council for its own sake” but to see the most appropriate arrangements for the future development of Athlone and the region.

3.4.2 Roscommon County Council Submission

In opening its submission, Roscommon County Council raised its concerns with regard to the Committee’s terms of reference as well as the scope of public consultation prior to and following its establishment. In particular, it cited the role of Public Participation Networks (PPNs) and the possibility of a plebiscite under the European Charter of Local Self Government.

The submission outlined the national, regional and local planning context. With regard to the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 (NSS), the AOI, while located in the West Region, lies within the zone of influence of both the Galway and Athlone Gateways. The submission argues that a boundary change is not necessary to achieve the NSS’s objectives. At a regional level, the Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region (2010-2022) identifies Monksland as a larger urban area. The Roscommon County Development Plan (2014-2020) has projected a population increase of 6,200 persons, based on Regional Planning Guidelines targets. The Plan also sets out objectives relating to Monksland as part of its Core
Strategy. In particular, Monksland/Bellanamullia is to have a strategic role and to support the sustainable development of South Roscommon. The area is a vital driver of socio-economic development that benefits the county as a whole.

The Roscommon County Development Plan, while highlighting the vital economic role of the Monksland/Bellanamullia area, also recognises that it will develop as an integral part of the Athlone Linked Gateway. In this regard, Westmeath County Council made initial approaches to develop a Joint Retail Strategy and Roscommon instigated communications in mid 2015 with Westmeath regarding development of a Joint Local Area Plan. The area is prioritised for future industrial development. Meanwhile, one of the main strategic aims of the Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2010-2016 was to develop the area as a Key Support Town / Settlement in the County, functionally linked to the Midland Gateway. This is also reflected in the Athlone – Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan for the period 2016-2022, which prioritises commercial and industrial development. The strategic importance of the area is reflected in the Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017. The submission argued therefore that any boundary change would be contrary to Government policies and to various national, regional and local strategies.

Roscommon County Council presented demographic data (Census 2011) that demonstrates the contrasting characteristics of the AOI and the County in general. For example, Monksland (Athlone environs) is the fastest growing area of the County, with a 53.7% increase in population between 2006 and 2011. The Council argued therefore that any extension of the boundary into the AOI would have a detrimental impact on the sustainability of County Roscommon as a whole.

With regard to representation, the submission argued that the change to representation that a boundary change would precipitate would result in de-prioritisation of the area. While currently representing a large and strategic part of County Roscommon, the area would face increased competition from other, larger towns in Westmeath. A boundary extension would result in a restructuring of the Municipal Districts, as the South Roscommon area (Athlone Municipal District) would no longer be viable. There would be a dilution of representation, with the ratio of citizens to councillors increasing.

Roscommon County Council has invested heavily in Monksland/Bellanamullia over the past 20 years: industrial lands for infrastructure development, roads, water and wastewater, housing, community services, energy, telecoms, health services and schools. Monksland’s ‘Town Team’ is currently developing a plan for the Monksland area, with projects to be funded by the Council.

The Council works closely with a range of regional and local agencies to support the service needs of the area and to promote social inclusion/community development. This includes its work with Westmeath County Council in delivery of the RAPID programme.

In relation to staffing and resources, as across the local government sector, staff numbers have decreased significantly in response to the economic crisis, with a resulting loss of corporate knowledge. A boundary extension would result in further loss of staff and flexibility, further reducing the ability of the Municipal District to deliver sustainable services.
to the remaining rural communities. The Council would no longer have a services hub to service the surrounding area of South Roscommon.

The financial impact of a boundary change, it is argued, would be significant for Roscommon County Council and would not generate any benefit in the aggregate for central government. The loss over a 20-year period is an estimated €91m in net present value terms. A boundary change incorporating Monksland would result in a loss to the rates income of 12% for the County and 60% for the Municipal District. Given the proportion of the County’s industrial and business zoned lands within the AOI, the loss to the County would amount to €13.15m in future commercial and residential development contributions.

As for efficiency in service delivery, while Roscommon County Council has a higher Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV), it has also has a higher collection rate. The Roscommon submission argued that spending on a square kilometre basis is more appropriate than on a per capita basis and, using this approach, Roscommon County Council delivers services more efficiently.

While the population in the area grew rapidly between 2002 and 2006, the population has since consolidated. From an identity perspective, this has resulted in two distinct areas: ‘old’ and ‘new’ Monksland. However, in contrast to Westmeath County Council’s perspective, the Monksland area, according to Roscommon County Council’s submission, represents a settlement in its own right, not a suburb of Athlone. As a result, the area has strong Roscommon allegiances. The submission recognises that allegiances in the newer residential areas are likely to be varied as a result of the influx of new residents. The submission also highlighted a number of impacts, e.g. loss of future funding and on a range of community initiatives and agencies serving the AOI.

Roscommon County Council set out an alternative to the alteration of the boundary based on enhanced cooperation with Westmeath. A number of specific proposals were put forward, including use of agreements under Section 85 and Section 86 of the Local Government Act 2001.

3.4.3 Meetings with Councillors

The Committee met separately with the elected members of both local authorities on two occasions. The views expressed largely reflected the content of the written submissions. The councillors gave specific local examples to support the perspectives of their county on the issue. Additional material was presented and has been considered as part of our deliberations.

The Committee welcomed the positive nature of the meetings and was impressed by the commitment of the elected members to their counties. Very useful suggestions were made as to how the future development of the area could be advanced. In spite of the inevitable tension generated by the contentious issue under consideration, the meetings were positive. Both sets of elected members were positively disposed towards cooperation and joint working. In the final meeting with Westmeath Councillors, they reiterated their position that a boundary change was the optimum solution but acknowledged the enormous reaction to the public consultation process from County Roscommon. At the final
meeting with Roscommon Councillors, they also reiterated their position but expressed a willingness to enter into a legally binding formal cooperative arrangement in areas including Planning, Tourism and Transport.
Chapter 4 Setting the Context

4.1 Relevant contextual issues arising from the Historical Development of Athlone and Monksland/Bellanamullia

Athlone developed from the Anglo-Norman settlement around King John’s castle built in 1210. The location was strategically chosen as the principal crossing point on the Shannon connecting the provinces of Connacht and Leinster, and from the mid-thirteenth century it developed as a walled town with additional defensive features. Following sieges in 1690-91, the military barracks were built on the western side of the River Shannon, and for the next 100 years further defensive structures were put in place on both sides of the River.

In the 1750s, the canal bypassed the shallows in the River Shannon at the town and allowed through traffic along the River for the first time. The railways arrived in the 1850s. The increased connectedness facilitated commercial and industrial growth in the town, much of it along the riverfront. The historic core on the eastern side of the River remains, with a largely intact medieval street pattern. The town centre on the western side of the River is dominated by the large footprints of Custume Barracks, Athlone Castle and the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul.

The boundary of the town (Urban District) was defined in the current local government code in 1898 to include lands on the western side of the River Shannon, which were included in county Westmeath. The western boundary of the town was defined using both junctions of the Athlone Canal with the Shannon and drawing straight lines to a convenient road junction, incorporating the built-up area at the time as well as additional rural lands. The boundary of the Town Council was extended into county Westmeath in 2004 to accommodate the residential and commercial/industrial expansion of the town and to allow the Urban District Council represent and manage the area as a single community.

At this stage, Athlone is the largest town in the Midlands, with a population of 20,153 (CSO 2011), of which 81% (16,327) live in county Westmeath and 19% (3,826) live in county Roscommon. Athlone is a regional centre in terms of employment, education, retail, tourism and industrial development. It is also an important administrative centre.

The town has traditionally developed along an east-west axis, driven historically by the topography, with boglands and lands prone to flooding north and south of this axis, and reinforced by the concentration of transportation infrastructure along this axis. It has a wide catchment area extending westwards into Roscommon and East Galway. In Westmeath, the town of Mullingar, with a comparable population, limits the extent of Athlone’s catchment in the county.

Modern development of that part of the town under the remit of Westmeath County Council has seen residential development expanded to the east (Coosan, Clonbrusk, Cornamaddy) and industrial development also in the same direction (IDA Business Park, Garrycastle, Blyry and Athlone Business Park). The industrial base of the town is modern and includes companies in the manufacturing, pharmaceutical, medical devices and IT
(manufacturing, telecoms and service support) sectors. The town is also the base for the Athlone Institute of Technology, with close to 5,000 students enrolled, and is the host to the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre, which is a hub for research and innovation in the Midland region. Research capacity is augmented by Georgia Tech Ireland, based in the IDA campus. Athlone Institute of Technology is also a national centre for sport and recreation.

The town is an important tourism centre in the Midlands, based primarily on the Shannon and Lough Ree. Athlone is also a regional retail centre in the Midlands.

Development of the town centre on the western side of the River within the remit of Westmeath County Council has primarily been residential and local services.

Development in Monksland /Bellanamullia has a much more recent history. The development of the area commenced in the 1970s with the provision of infrastructure to support industrial development in Monksland. This evolved over time due to a strategic decision by Roscommon County Council\(^6\) to focus development effort within the county in the Monksland area. Significant resources have been invested by the Council in land purchases to facilitate commercial and industrial development. Industrial development includes an important cluster of pharmaceutical factories, together with factories in the food and chemical sectors.

There has been significant residential development, primarily in housing estates along the new Tuam Road, with ribbon development predominant along the Crannagh Beg Road. There has also been substantial retail and retail warehousing development in Monksland/Bellanamullia. Investment in a variety of community facilities has also been made, but provision of these is still deficient, as is recognised in the current Roscommon County Development Plan\(^7\).

It is not clear that the development to date has been based on a strategic vision of the area as a town in its own right or as an integrated part of Athlone as a whole; the area has become a key developmental area within Roscommon, providing a dynamic urban presence in South Roscommon while only partially integrated with the urban fabric of Athlone.

Athlone, with Mullingar and Tullamore, form the Midland Gateway. There is some confusion in regard to the relationship of Monksland/Bellanamullia with the Gateway. Monksland is recognised in the Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010-2022 as effectively part of the Athlone Gateway, while the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midlands notes that the environs of Athlone (Monksland) are catered for in the Regional Planning Guidelines of the West Regional Authority. The Roscommon County Development Plan 2014-2020 (para 2.3.4) recognises the area as part of the larger linked Gateway in planning terms.

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\(^6\) This was about the same time as the opening of the bypass bridge in 1991. Note that a 1991 Athlone Environs Plan was based on a 1979 Athlone Development Plan Study which included Monksland as within the urban envelope of Athlone.

The Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines envisage the Midland Gateway as a driver of economic growth in the region, with strong links to all the other spatial elements through a well-developed urban hierarchy that will deliver the benefits of growth to the region as a whole. These Regional Planning Guidelines envisage Joint Local Area Plans amongst relevant Local Authorities to provide a planning framework for the future physical, economic and social development of Athlone and the Monksland/Bellanamullia area.

4.2 Brief description of the Area of Interest (see map at Figure 1)

When requesting submissions on its terms of reference, the Committee considered it necessary to provide a map of an indicative Area of Interest to assist interested persons engage with the Committee. It was made clear, however, that the Committee would not be restricted to considering only this area; it would consider a smaller or larger area as appropriate. In short, the Committee has examined the Area of Interest in the context of Athlone as a whole, on both sides of the River Shannon.

The Area of Interest was centred on the zoned lands in the Monksland and Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2010-2016 made on 26 April 2010, which was the then-current Local Area Plan for the environs of Athlone within County Roscommon\(^8\). Currently developed lands in Monksland/Bellanamullia and lands zoned for development are thus included in the Area of Interest.

In order to ensure the Committee would have submissions in relation to possible additional areas to be considered, within its terms of reference, the indicative Area of Interest was extended to a convenient road junction and the motorway/railway intersection. Outside the zoned lands of the LAP, the area is rural, primarily in agricultural use. Hodson Bay is functionally separate from Athlone town and Monksland/Bellanamullia and therefore was not included in the Area of Interest.

4.3 Status of Athlone as part of the Athlone/Mullingar/Tullamore Linked Gateway

4.3.1 The National Spatial Strategy 2002

The National Spatial Strategy for Ireland (NSS) 2002 - 2020 is a 20-year planning framework designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic, physical development and population growth between regions. The NSS identified 9 Gateways where public and private investment would be prioritised. Athlone is part of one of these, namely the linked Midlands Gateway of Athlone/Mullingar/Tullamore.

The NSS gives the following as the basis for selecting Athlone/Mullingar/Tullamore as a Linked Gateway:

\(^8\) The Committee was aware that the zoned lands in the Monksland/ Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2016-2020, published in draft in October 2015, are less extensive than in the 2010 LAP.
“Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore are reasonably proximate to one another, strategically located on east-west road rail energy and communications links, contain complementary infrastructure and individually and collectively, have substantial capacity for development in services terms. For example, Athlone contains the Institute of Technology, a range of employers and important retail functions.”

The NSS does not exclude Monksland/Bellanamullia from the Gateway.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is currently in preparation by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and will replace the NSS. It will be a 20-year plan and will guide the preparation of the future Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and County/City Development Plans. It is due to be in place by the first quarter of 2017. Since January 2015 the former 8 Regional Authorities have been replaced by 3 Regional Assemblies. Westmeath is now in the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly, while Roscommon is in the Northern and Western Regional Assembly.

4.3.2 Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines, 2010-2020

The Midlands Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) relate to the counties of Westmeath, Laois, Offaly and Longford. A key aspect of the RPGs is about building on and enhancing the competitiveness and attractiveness of the region within a spatial planning hierarchy. The Midlands RPG focuses on a coordinated approach between local authorities as follows:

“Three settlements that have been identified in the Midland Region as requiring a joined up planning approach include (i) Athlone Monksland/Bealnamulla, (ii) Carlow/Graiguecullen and (iii) Portarlington. These settlements present specific challenges and opportunities that require a focused approach and coordinated action amongst Local Authorities. The RPGs support the preparation of joint local area plans for areas that straddle administrative boundaries in order to provide a coordinated framework for the sustainable physical development of the area having regard to the respective housing, retail and other Local Authority strategies that may be in place.”

4.3.3 The Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region, 2010

The Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region (counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon) noted that Athlone has a significant influence on the economic development of south Roscommon through Monksland, which is effectively part of the Athlone Gateway. One of the Settlement Strategy Objectives of these Guidelines states that Local Authority Development Plan policies and Local Area Plan policies in County Roscommon shall be prepared in consultation with Westmeath County Council and Athlone Town Council with regard to the Athlone Gateway and the development of Monksland.

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11 Midland Regional Authority, Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region 2010-2022, (2010, p. 72)
4.3.4 Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First, 2012

*Putting People First* is a milestone document published by the then Department of Environment, Community and Local Government. Its objectives were given legal status through the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

In regard to towns and Municipal Districts, paragraph 6.4.2(c) specifically refers to Athlone, inter alia, and states:

“... in all cases the district should incorporate the relevant hinterland of each town, subject to the constraints imposed by county boundaries close to towns e.g. New Ross located adjacent to the Kilkenny/Wexford boundary, Carrick-on-Suir adjacent to the boundary between Tipperary and Waterford, or Athlone on the Roscommon/Westmeath border. In cases such as these, suitable agency arrangements or service level agreements should be implemented to ensure that one authority has responsibility for all functions (including development plans) and services throughout the entire area of the town, notwithstanding county boundaries."\(^{12}\)

4.4 Strategic Planning Policies

4.4.1 Roscommon County Development Plan, 2014-2020

The Development Plan points out that a feature of the Monksland/Bellanamullia area in recent years has been an accelerated growth in terms of housing and population. It also envisages that it will develop as part of a larger settlement, Athlone Town. In recognition of this, and to distinguish it from the ‘Key Towns’ within Tier 2 of the county settlement strategy, Monksland/Bellanamullia is assigned the designation of a Special Category settlement within Tier 2 of the settlement Hierarchy.

The Development Plan goes on to discuss the relationship of Monksland with Athlone:

“It is acknowledged, however, that Monksland has a vital economic role in terms of its strategic location as part of Athlone, which is part of the Midland Linked Gateway (triad of centres) ... As recommended by the Retail Planning Guidelines (2012) coordination in relation to local planning issues in terms of policy and a joint Retail Strategy is required on the part of Roscommon and Westmeath County Councils. Roscommon County Council endorses this approach and has made initial approaches to its neighbouring County Council in this regard.”\(^{13}\)

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However, the Roscommon County Development Plan 2014-2020, while recommending cooperation with Westmeath on local planning issues, does not propose a unitary plan or joint local area plans for Monksland and Athlone.

4.4.2 Athlone Town Development Plan, 2014-2020

The Athlone Town Plan acknowledges that part of the environs of Athlone is located within the jurisdiction of Roscommon County Council. This area does not form part of the Athlone Town Plan but is subject to the recently adopted Monksland/Bellanamullia Local Area Plan 2016-2022. The Athlone Town Plan recommends that a unitary plan be prepared for Athlone with Roscommon:

“In order to ensure the coordinated development of the Midland Gateway it remains a Strategic Objective of Westmeath County Council and Athlone Town Council to secure the preparation and adoption of a unitary plan to be prepared in collaboration with Roscommon County Council.”

4.4.3 Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan, 2016-2022

The Monksland/Bellanamullia Plan envisages that area will develop as an integral part of the Athlone Linked Gateway and act as a vital driver of social and economic development, with beneficial effects for the county. The Plan sees the area as vital for industry and manufacturing development opportunities, for assisting in the county's economic recovery, and for increasing job opportunities in the county. It will continue to be the prime industrial centre in the county.

4.4.4 Proposed Unitary Development Plan for Athlone

About seven years ago there were meetings between Westmeath and Roscommon County Council in relation to agreement on the content of a unitary plan for Athlone. These meetings were facilitated by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. It was envisaged at that time that Westmeath would be the single authority responsible for planning for the area. However, the process did not advance beyond the initial meetings.

Three provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, are worth noting:

“9(3)(a) A planning authority may, with the agreement of one or more local authorities which are adjoining local authorities, or on the direction of the Minister shall, make a single development plan for its functional area and any environs of that area which form part of any adjoining local authorities.”

“9(7)(a) The Minister may require 2 or more planning authorities to co-ordinate the development plans for their areas generally or in respect of specified matters and in a manner specified by the Minister”

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14 Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020, (Volume 1, p. 9)
“18(2) Two or more planning authorities may co-operate in preparing a local area plan in respect of any area which lies within the combined functional area of the authorities concerned.”

4.4.5 Retail Development Issues

The 2012 Retail Planning Guidelines require all planning authorities to include retail strategies in their Development Plans. Because retail catchments frequently transcend local authority boundaries, the Guidelines required that, in the case of certain adjoining local authorities, joint or multi-authority retail strategies were mandatory. A multi-authority retail strategy was required for Westmeath, Offaly and Roscommon. The Westmeath County Development Plan 2014-2020 and the Roscommon County Development Plan 2014-2020 have individual retail strategies for their respective counties but not the required multi-authority retail strategy. However, both the Westmeath and Roscommon County Development Plans include an objective to prepare a joint retail strategy.

In regard to retail development in Monksland specifically, the Roscommon County Development Plan clearly states that retail development in Monksland has had a negative effect on the town centre of Athlone;

“The Council views the uncontrolled proliferation of retail and retail warehousing in these areas as unsustainable and ultimately undermining the proper development of the town centres of their parent settlements. In this context it is envisaged that Cortober and Monksland develop the retail functions of local neighbourhood/District centre”

The Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan (LAP) 2016-2022 replaces the Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2010-2016. In the earlier plan there were 3 District Centres zoned. In the Draft Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2016-2022 there was only one District Centre zoned, and this was 9.58 ha in area. Material alterations to the Draft LAP were made by the Council, included increasing the area of the District Centre to 14.45 ha. This and the other material alterations were put on public display. 14 submissions came in from various parties, including one from Westmeath County Council. Westmeath objected to the increase in the zoned area for the District Centre and to the extent of the area zoned for retail warehousing on the basis of the potential to adversely impact on Athlone town centre. However, these material alterations were adopted by Roscommon County Council, and the Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2016-2022 became operative in July 2016.

The Retail Planning Guidelines define District Centres as follows:

“The role of a district centre is to provide a range of retail and non-retail service functions (e.g. banks, post office, local offices, restaurants, public houses, community

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15 Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Guidelines for Planning Authorities: Retail Planning (2012)
Monksland/Bellanamullia, in the environs of Athlone, has a population of approximately 4,000. A planning application for a district centre in Monksland was refused on appeal to An Bord Pleanála on the basis that the level of retail vacancy in Monksland was such that further retail development could not be justified. A subsequent planning application was made to Roscommon County Council for a District Shopping Centre on the same site in Monksland but smaller in size than the previous one. On appeal, An Bord Pleanála, in February 2016, again refused permission for this District Centre in Monksland on the basis, inter alia, that “it would negatively impact on the vitality and viability of Athlone Town Centre” (ref PL 20.245569).

It should be noted that the site area of this refused District Centre was 1.45 ha. The area zoned for a District Centre in the recently adopted Monksland/Bellanamullia LAP was increased from 9.58 ha to 14.45 ha.

4.5 Other Local Government policy issues

4.5.1 Housing

The Roscommon County Development Plan 2014-2020 includes a Core Strategy that provides projected population growth figures for Monksland/Bellanamullia over the plan period. Projected population growth is allocated in accordance with the Settlement Hierarchy included in the RCDP, which identifies Monksland/Bellanamullia as a Tier 2 (Special Category) Settlement in the County. The population allocation for Monksland/Bellanamullia for 2014-2020 is 538 people and 215 housing units.\(^{18}\)

The Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2016 – 2022 has zoned residential land in line with the Core Strategy of the Roscommon County Development Plan and has accordingly reduced the 157 ha zoned for residential development in the previous Monksland/Bellanamullia LAP 2010-2016 to 23.20 ha in the current LAP.

The Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 points out that according to the 2011 census, there are 7,616 permanent dwellings in the legally defined town of Athlone. It is estimated that to meet the population target increase of 8,482 set in the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 for Athlone, 3,310 housing units will be required up to 2020. The achievement of this target is constrained by limitations in the environmental carrying capacity associated with the Waste Water Treatment infrastructure.

\(^{17}\) Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, *Guidelines for Planning Authorities: Retail Planning* (2012, pp. 21-22)

4.5.2 Economic Development

Roscommon has the third highest level of out-migration compared to other counties (35% compared to the State average of 24.8%). This is particularly evident among the young generation of 18-39 year olds, leading to the classic ‘brain drain’ scenario (Census 2011).

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs highlights the strengths of the medtech and life sciences/pharma clusters in the West Region as a key economic driver, and in particular its growing presence in the Monksland region in South Roscommon.

The future economic strategy in the recently adopted Monksland/Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2016-2022 includes a strong emphasis on pharmaceutical businesses, as well as financial services, shared services, micro-enterprise and tourism sectors. Investment in broadband, transport and social infrastructure will be critical in supporting the strategy.

The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010-2022 outline a series of strategic requirements to drive the region’s economy and enhance its overall business environment. Amongst other issues, the guidelines require that priority should be given to targeting the development of activities that capitalise on existing and emerging strengths in the linked gateway town of Athlone, in addition to promoting the development of all sectors within the town. In this regard, it specifies the development of the following sectors in Athlone:

- “ICT-related activities.
- Pharmaceuticals and related activities.
- Education.
- International Trading.
- Shared Services (multi-lingual)
- Research and Development”

The Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 states that there is an established tradition of manufacturing, pharmaceutical, research and development, medical devices, telecommunications software industries, and retailing in the town.

4.6 Comparative Analysis

The Committee investigated international experiences with boundary changes and inter-local authority working. Indeed, number of the submissions made to the Committee referred to international examples of joint working between adjoining local authorities.

While it is of course instructive to look at international examples for ideas that could potentially be replicated in Ireland, it is also necessary to acknowledge the different range of powers, responsibilities and roles assigned to local authorities across different countries,

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19 Midland Regional Authority, Regional Planning Guidelines for the Midland Region 2010-2022, (2010, p. 52)
and sometimes even within countries. Local authorities vary in their range of functions, their population size, their decision-making structures, their revenue raising powers, and so on. Every local government system is different to some extent, shaped by national and local circumstances. Comparative analysis must take into consideration the unique historical and cultural factors in diverse areas that lead to distinctive political and administrative traditions. Different features of local government systems in different jurisdictions must be considered when drawing on international examples of boundary change. Amongst these can be included:

- Differences in functional responsibilities and the suite of services provided by local government – arrangements in other jurisdictions may relate to the choice of service delivery models that may be relevant to the provision of services provided by local government in that country. Depending on the country in question, this can include public services that are not delivered by local authorities in Ireland, including primary and secondary education, childcare, public transport, primary healthcare, social services, or (in the case of North America) policing.

- Differences in the size of local government units – arrangements in other jurisdictions may relate to the size of local government units in that country (typically measured in terms of population size). For example, local authorities (often referred to as municipalities) in continental Europe and North America on average are considerably smaller than the 31 county and city councils in Ireland, and some decisions around service delivery models may relate to the relatively smaller size of local government units.

- Differences in local government financing – local government systems vary in terms of the extent to which local authorities have financial discretion in raising revenue and the extent of central government controls over local government expenditure. The result is differences in the balance between local sources of revenue and central funding, in the balance between central discretionary grants and central specific grants, and in the buoyancy of local sources of revenue.

In addition to these fundamental differences between systems of local government, there are also differences between jurisdictions in the nature of boundary change. In the United States, for example, the most common form of boundary change comes from instances where a municipality expands its territory through taking responsibility for an area that is not serviced by another municipality (a so-called ‘unincorporated area’). This is a process that is not directly comparable to the current proposal concerning Athlone, namely the proposed change to the boundary of one local authority to include an Area of Interest currently serviced by another local authority.

These differences in scale, service responsibility and financial resources are significant in influencing the criteria used in considering proposals for boundary changes. Different forms of revenue streams for local authorities produce different potential financial implications arising from boundary change. The nature of distinctive service responsibilities has to be considered in assessing proposals for boundary change. The process for undertaking

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boundary reviews varies from country to country (and sometimes between different regions/states within the same country). All of this means that identifying directly comparable ‘like-for-like’ cases as a means of assessing the Athlone situation is highly unlikely.

The Committee therefore concluded that the Athlone case must be considered on its own merits, and that an approach based on searching for a direct ‘like-for-like’ comparator with Athlone would lack validity. Nevertheless, the Committee was conscious of drawing on international experience in terms of the criteria and methodologies that can be used to evaluate proposed boundary change in different jurisdictions, even if these would have to be adapted to suit the particular characteristics of the Irish local government system (this is further reflected on in section 5.1). The Committee also drew on the growing international trend of inter-local authority working between neighbouring local authorities in identifying options (see also section 5.1).
Chapter 5 Issues Arising

5.1 Introduction

The terms of reference for the Committee required it to carry out a review of the County Boundary between Roscommon and Westmeath, make recommendations in respect of this boundary, and address any consequential changes to the Municipal District of Athlone “that it considers necessary in the interests of effective and convenient local government”. As a result, the Committee has focused in particular on the boundary at Athlone and on the option of extending the boundary of Westmeath into Roscommon to include Monksland/Bellanamullia. This option would provide for a single local authority to be responsible for all local authority services for Athlone and the contiguous built-up area of Monksland/Bellanamullia.

The Committee considered that 3 scenarios should be examined across a standard set of criteria to assist in analysing the issues relevant to its terms of reference. These scenarios are:

- **No Change**: to leave the boundary between the two counties exactly as it is and make no further recommendations.

- **No Change with greater use of agreements under Section 85 or 86 of the Local Government Act 2001, or other form of structured cooperation between the local authorities**: Section 85 is a commonly used mechanism that allows one local authority, by agreement, to perform specified functions of the other local authority for the area of the local authority as a whole, or for part of the area. Section 86 is less commonly used, and provides that local authorities may perform agreed functions jointly. There are also a broad range of cooperative mechanisms used by adjoining local authorities to suit specific requirements, and these mechanisms can be either short-term to address specific circumstances or long-term standing arrangements. As noted in section 4.4.4, section 9 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, provides for the possibility of a single development plan between adjoining local authorities. Joint planning, shared services, and inter-local authority agreements between neighbouring local authorities are also increasingly common features of local government service provision both nationally and internationally. In some instances, inter-local agreements are pursued as an alternative to boundary change.

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21 Agreement that another local authority shall perform certain functions under section 85 for a local authority is reserved to the elected members of that authority.

22 A decision to use Section 86 is not a reserved function.

• **Redraw to Boundary:** To extend the Westmeath boundary into the Area of Interest previously defined by the Committee. For the purposes of this scenario, the Committee is conscious that the Area of Interest is just that and no more, and that any change in the boundary may or may not be the same as the indicative Area of Interest provided to assist in the public consultation process. In practice, the examination of this scenario focused on the development envelope of Monksland/Bellanamullia in the context of Athlone as a whole.

No other significant scenario emerged from the public consultation process. In looking at the extension of the Westmeath boundary, rather than the reverse as was suggested in a number of submissions (i.e. to make the River Shannon the boundary at Athlone), the Committee notes that the Minister’s main rationale for the review, as outlined in his press release on 19 June 2015, is “to bring the administrative jurisdictions into line with the current settlement and development position ... given the significant overspill of population ... into another county”.

The criteria against which each of these scenarios were examined are summarised as follows:

- **Cost and Efficiency Savings:** the focus is on the financial and other implications, including the costs and savings to one or other local authority, and overall benefits and costs or savings. To the extent possible, these costs and savings have been quantified and efficiencies and value for money have been identified.

- **Economic and social development and regional voice:** this focuses on the developmental responsibilities of local authorities in the spatial and socio-economic spheres and includes the contribution local authorities make to settlement and employment patterns and to the economic and social development of their wider region.

- **Community identity and cohesion:** particularly how different scenarios might impact on the identity and cohesion of local communities.

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24 Some examples exist abroad of further attempts to legislate for other compromise solutions between local authorities as an alternative to boundary change. For example, the US state of Michigan allows local authorities to enter into negotiated agreements on service provision and the transfer of local government jurisdiction for a specific area for a set contract period. The agreements also include arrangements to share revenue accruing from the area between the two local authorities, including from future development. The contract period tends to be long-term (most are negotiated for periods of between 45 and 50 years), and should specify what happens to the area at the end of the agreement – in roughly half of the agreements negotiated at the end of the contract period the land permanently transfers, in roughly a third of cases the land reverts to the original local authority jurisdiction, and in the remainder a renegotiation or split in jurisdiction is envisaged. See: Bassett, E.M. “‘This Land Is Our Land?’ An Analysis of Land-Use Planning and Cooperation under Michigan’s Conditional Land Transfer Act’, *State and Local Government Review*, 38(1), 2006, pp. 23-33; Zeemering, E.S. ‘Negotiation and Noncooperation: Debating Michigan’s Conditional Land Transfer Agreement’, *State and Local Government Review*, 40(1), 2008, pp. 1-11.
• Service delivery across the full range of services for which local authorities are responsible: these are the wide range of services of direct benefit to citizens and local communities, which the Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First and the Local Government Reform Act 2014 envisage being performed by local authorities.

• Governance and Accountability: examines the impacts of the scenarios on local government structures for both local authorities and the contiguous area of Athlone-Monksland/Bellanamullia under these headings.

These criteria are based on the considerations the Committee was required to have regard to as part of its terms of reference. In addition, they have also been informed by the criteria typically used to evaluate proposed boundary changes in other jurisdictions: financial implications (changes in expenditure demands, implications from changes to the tax base for revenues from local taxes and intergovernmental grant allocations); spatial planning issues (providing a more coherent or integrated development framework for the wider area, the physical and natural features of the area subject to proposed boundary change, the population of the proposed area, the mix of residential, commercial and agricultural land-use in the area and new development potential); and issues around local identity and the predisposition of citizens in the area concerned towards boundary change.

It is recognised that for the last 4 criteria identified, quantification and monetisation of the benefits and costs would be more difficult than for the first criterion, and these criteria have been dealt with qualitatively.

5.2 Cost and Efficiency Savings

To establish what efficiencies, if any, could be achieved as a result of a boundary change it is necessary to look at contextual developments in local government in recent years. These comprise:

• Structural reforms, including the abolition of 80 town councils and the mergers of Waterford City and County Council, North and South Tipperary County Council and Limerick City and County Council.

• New funding and governance arrangements, including the introduction of a local property tax to fund local services, and performance monitoring with the establishment of the National Oversight and Audit Commission.

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The general public service moratorium on recruitment and promotion and incentivised early retirement and career break schemes, resulting in an overall staffing reduction of close to 30% in the local government sector. Both the Croke Park and Haddington Road Agreements also introduced pay reductions and additional working hours.

- The establishment of Irish Water, which removed a key service that had been provided by local authorities and re-assigned staff, for at least the period of the Service Level Agreement.

- The increased prominence of shared services within local government in areas such as payroll and superannuation, procurement, waste collection permitting and the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme.

Proposals for boundary change often have financial implications. It is suggested that changes can result in reduced costs or increased efficiencies for one or more of those local authorities affected. Boundary changes, when implemented, are said to have scale effects on local authorities, either adding or detracting from both the population base and the geographical area of the local authorities concerned.

However, the question of costs and efficiencies within local government, and their relationship with scale, is a complex and disputed one. Much of the international and domestic research suggests in fact a limited relationship between scale and costs and efficiencies. Tests to establish a statistical relationship between the size of local government units and costs or performance standards suggest in many cases that there is no relationship between the two. Where such a relationship might exist, this is likely to relate to the specific nature of different services provided. Some research suggests that any scale effects on efficiency are most likely to be positive in cases of more capital-intensive local government services, specialised services, and certain ‘back office’ corporate functions. However, any scale effects are more likely to be potentially negative for more labour-intensive local government services. This suggests that increasing or reducing the size of individual local authorities is unlikely to have intrinsic efficiency value in itself.

The Committee concludes that the net costs of a boundary change to the local government system as a whole are likely to be neutral, in the sense that increasing or reducing the size of the two local authorities concerned is unlikely in itself to have inherent efficiency effects. Based on the submissions from both authorities and evidence assembled, it is the view of the Committee that a boundary alteration will not realise any further efficiency. Both authorities currently fulfil their respective roles in the Area of Interest in an efficient manner. That said, there would of course be financial implications arising from a boundary change for the specific local authorities concerned.

On the revenue side, financial implications arise primarily in the context of changes to the tax base that might arise from a boundary change (impacting on commercial rates and LPT revenue), and possible effects of adjustments to central government general grant allocations to both local authorities. On the expenditure side, additional costs could arise to

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Westmeath resulting from the servicing of additional land, alongside reduced costs arising for Roscommon resulting from the servicing of less land.

In its submission, Westmeath County Council pointed to the significant investment in the Civic Offices in Athlone Town Centre and in civic, cultural, community, recreational and infrastructural facilities and stated that people who live on the Roscommon side avail of these in some cases. It noted 8 services not currently available to that population (e.g. motor tax) and suggested that the extension of the boundary would allow these to be made available. Roscommon County Council pointed to integrated provision provided by the Athlone Municipal District structure and the unviability of same if the boundary were to be extended.

The main net financial implications of a boundary change to extend the Westmeath boundary to include the development envelope of Monksland/Bellanamullia, as estimated by Westmeath County Council, would be the cost of an additional elected member in Westmeath (not offset by a reduction in Councillors in Roscommon, which currently has the minimum of 18 elected members) and a net reduction in rates income of €350,000 per annum due to downward equalisation of the ARV in Monksland/Bellanamullia, potentially (depending on choices made to raise revenues locally) leading to a call for increased subvention from central Government funds. The Roscommon ARV is currently €71.44, and the Westmeath ARV is currently €54.54. Westmeath County Council assumed no net increase in income from LPT, as the increased income from residential properties in Monksland/Bellanamullia would be offset by a downward adjustment of the provisions for equalisation. From the figures provided by the two Local Authorities, the Committee did not find evidence that extending the boundary would lead to cost savings in service delivery.

5.3 Economic and Social Development and Regional Voice

Monksland/Bellanamullia is a strong economic driver for Roscommon, with almost two fifths of all the industrial zoned land in the county. This continue under the ‘no change’ scenario. In addition, the industries in Monksland have built up a strong working relationship with Roscommon County Council, and they wish this to continue.

There is a strong feeling in Roscommon that an extension of Westmeath into Roscommon to absorb Monksland/Bellanamullia would undermine the county’s potential and seriously diminish its economic and social development – as evidenced by nearly 28,000 submissions against the possible extension.

On the other hand, maintaining the status quo would mean that the regional voice of Athlone, split between two Regional Assemblies and without the additional 4,000 population and the industrial development in Monksland/Bellanamullia, would not be as strong. This could militate against Athlone achieving a higher status in, for instance, the upcoming National Planning Framework and in the future Eastern and Midlands Regional Economic and Spatial Strategy. There is a potential for future conflict and competition between Westmeath and Roscommon in regard to industrial, commercial and retail development in the Area of Interest (AOI), with negative spatial and socio-economic impacts. Extending the boundary could provide an integrated Athlone, improve the
effectiveness of local government and give the town a stronger voice nationally. It could also allow for a unified approach to attracting investment, both nationally and internationally.

Strategic policies in regard to industry, commerce, retail, housing and infrastructure would be integrated under a unitary Development Plan or Local Area Plan for Athlone. Furthermore, whereas Athlone is within the area of the new Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly, the AOI is within the Northern & Western Regional Assembly. This means that the two different parts of Athlone will come under separate regional spatial and economic strategies. Extending the Westmeath boundary would bring Athlone and this suburb under a single Regional Assembly.

On the other hand, because the AOI is seen as strategically important both economically and socially for Roscommon and contains 39% of the county’s industrial zoned land, the transfer of this area to Westmeath could significantly weaken Roscommon’s economic base. The Roscommon County Development Plan describes the Monksland/Bellanamullia area as “a vital driver of social and economic development with consequential beneficial effects for the entire county.”

A boundary change removing the strong urban area of the AOI from Athlone Municipal District in Roscommon would reduce this Municipal District to encompassing only a rural area with small villages. This would be at odds with the Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First, which envisaged a municipal district focused around a significant town. The demographic age profile of Roscommon would also become older if the AOI was removed, as this area has a significantly younger population than the remainder of Roscommon.

An extension of the boundary of Athlone to remove the AOI from County Roscommon could create a strong residual antipathy towards Westmeath and damage social cohesion. Of note here is the tone of many of the 28,000 submissions made against this proposal, including the submission from Roscommon County Council. An extension could diminish the current level of cooperation between Roscommon and Westmeath, particularly at political level, in the medium to long term.

Greater use of section 85/86 or other agreements between Roscommon and Westmeath would allow for the provision of shared services so that the focus would be on the overall, integrated development of Athlone, including Monksland/Bellanamullia. These agreements would minimise the potential for conflict or duplication in the facilitation of economic and social development, would have the potential to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of delivery of local government services and could increase clarity and convenience for customers who could access almost all services locally.

Such arrangements can have their own challenges, and there may be difficulties in enforcing this cooperation. For instance, the 2012 Retail Planning Guidelines had a mandatory requirement that Roscommon, Westmeath and Offaly prepare a joint retail strategy and incorporate this into their Development Plans. This was not done for the preparation of the

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27 Roscommon Submission, pg 8.
two County Development Plans adopted in 2014; however, both Development Plans include a policy to provide a joint retail strategy.

Whereas most services, including Development Management in Planning, could be delivered through Section 85 agreements, the current statutory process, where Council members are responsible for making Development Plans, may lead to difficulties in delivering a unified Development Plan for Athlone and the AOI.

However, the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, now includes provision to make a single Development Plan for the specific circumstances that exist with Athlone and the AOI, or two local authorities may cooperate in order to co-ordinate the Development Plans or Local Area Plans for a specific area which lies within their combined functional area (see section 4.4.4 above).

As part of its work, the Committee sought the views of some national organisations involved in infrastructural and economic development. Local infrastructural development is largely controlled by national organisations and government departments, with local government often playing an implementation role. Most such organisations have a national remit that transcends county/city boundaries. While almost all expressed a view that it was preferable to deal with the minimum number of organisations, the existence of boundaries was not presented as a major challenge. Current cooperation between the local authorities and infrastructural providers was acknowledged, as was the occasional competition between counties for investment. In one case, an example was given of peak-hour congestion arising from rapid development. However, there was no suggestion that this was a result of an inappropriate boundary.

### 5.4 Community Identity and Cohesion

Most citizens have an instinctive understanding of their own sense of identity and belonging. In the Irish context, the county clearly remains a strong source of local identity and affiliation. Successive reports on local government reform have emphasised the county structure (alongside cities) as the primary unit of local government in Ireland. The 2008 Green Paper on Local Government reform suggested that “the county basis of local government in Ireland remains sacrosanct”\(^{28}\). In relation to boundary changes, it noted the “particular emotional affinity to county boundaries” and that “proposals to alter county administrative boundaries [are] politically divisive, highly emotive, and difficult to resolve [and] lead to significant public resistance”\(^{29}\). Aside from formal local government structures, an increasing number of sporting, political, social and representational groups were organised on a county basis from the late 19\(^{th}\) and into the early 20\(^{th}\) century\(^{30}\). Proposed


\(^{30}\) Daly, M.E. ‘The County in Irish History’, pp. 1-11 in M.E. Daly (ed.) *County & Town: One Hundred Years of Local Government in Ireland*, RTÉ Thomas Davis Lecture Series, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration
changes to Dáil constituencies which do not respect county boundaries also tend to spark public resistance. This strong attachment to the county structure has been reflected in many of the submissions received by the Committee.

Defining and clarifying community identity and cohesion is problematic. Some research\(^{31}\) suggests that local identity is not a mutually exclusive issue, and that several different levels of geographic community identity can exist in an area; at neighbourhood level, village/townland level, town level, district level, county level, and provincial/regional level. Each of these geographic areas might relate to different areas of service provision, from childcare at a highly localised level to transport planning at a metropolitan level. In addition to several potential ‘geographical’ communities, community identity can also relate to historical or social traditions or distinctiveness (such as a shared heritage), physical communities based around the coherence and interdependency between town and hinterland, functional communities (whereby people are drawn together through common or shared activities, such as shopping, sporting and leisure activities, and education and schools), and perceptual communities (how the local community identify themselves). All of this results in community identity typically being a flexible and dynamic reality. Given the complex and evolving nature of community identity, one conclusion drawn has been that “an all-embracing notion of community identity is virtually impossible to delineate in terms of fixed boundaries around definite geographical areas, [so] the questions of approximations and constructions comes more sharply into play”\(^{32}\).

Social capital derives from networks and relationships based on trust, shared norms and values. Shared norms and values arise, \textit{inter alia}, from individuals sharing a common bond based on a sense of shared community and a sense of belonging. Social capital is recognised as a contributor to sustainable development, and its importance to economic development can be significant. County identity in Roscommon – “Rossies together” – has been identified as an important element of the social capital of the county and is leveraged in gaining support for the development of the county through the global diaspora of people from the area who strongly identify with their home county.

In terms of the scenarios considered by the Committee, a decision to leave the boundary as it is, or to employ greater use of section 85 and 86 agreements or other forms of structured cooperation would see Roscommon county identity maintained. Such identity was, to repeat, stated to be of key importance in most submissions from those opposed to a boundary change. This issue of identity has been put in social, sporting, community, cultural, heritage, historical, education, tourism, LEADER, social capital, sustainable development and business contexts, with negative impacts seen under all these headings. Given the number of submissions from Roscommon inhabitants outside the Area of Interest, it is clear that the cohesion of the county as a whole is of major importance to people outside the Area of


Interest and that a boundary change would impinge on this. As well as the county identity being protected, provincial identity would also be protected.

At the more local level, the Monksland/Bellanamullia area is seen as an integral part of South Roscommon, distinct from Athlone on the other side of the Shannon, and with strong links to the wider South Roscommon area. This is seen as best protected by the area remaining in County Roscommon.

While Monksland/Bellanamullia is a relatively new urban settlement, the older part of it is sufficiently long established to have evolved a strong local community identity rooted in Roscommon. Community groups have developed strong links with Roscommon County Council, links that would be damaged by a transfer to Westmeath. The newer developments in Monksland/Bellanamullia lack the same level of community cohesion as the older areas, and “Roscommon” is not necessarily a key element of their identity.

Greater use of sections 85 or 86 agreements or other forms of structured cooperation would have a marginal impact on community identity and cohesion. There is scope for integration across the two Councils in their engagement with local communities, especially where there is a common focus across the Shannon for particular purposes. Joint working through the PPNs in both counties could be a feature of such agreements, where relevant. The integrated approach may have some practical benefits in terms of local government functional responsibilities and service delivery. However, significant impacts, positive or negative, do not arise in relation to community identity and cohesion. In the context of the likelihood that citizens can have multiple identities at different geographical levels, the development of a strong Athlone identity for residents of Monksland/Bellanamullia, while retaining existing County allegiances, could be nurtured.

On the other hand, maintenance of the current boundaries would not foster a community identity for the Athlone-Monksland/Bellanamullia area as a whole.

Not all the local communities are defined on the basis of local authority boundaries, with much cross-over between Athlone and Monksland/Bellanamullia for educational, sporting, religious and other community and cultural purposes. Leaving the boundary unchanged (either with or without greater structured cooperation) would not further promote these.

It is noted that Roscommon already contains an area that a national sporting organisation, for its own purposes, decided many years ago should be regarded as part of another county (Ballaghaderreen). Meanwhile, clubs under other codes in the Westmeath side of Athlone play in Connaught provincial structures. Quite correctly, such bodies regard administrative boundaries, even boundaries with significant historical significance, as fluid where this suits their purposes.

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33 Pg 34, Roscommon submission.

34 Pg 5, Westmeath submission
The option of extending the boundary could allow for a new sense of community identity, focused on Athlone to be fostered and would be supportive of the integrated and sustainable development of the town as a whole. However, such an option would encounter difficulty in ensuring community buy-in to the change. Those living in the extended area who identify themselves as from Roscommon, with this fact as a key element of their identity, would not find the change in boundary easy. It would not be possible to resolve the concerns of those outside the extended area for whom the existing Roscommon boundary is crucial to their sense of Roscommon identity. It would be necessary for the decision to overcome any sense of 'land-grab' of the area of Roscommon by Westmeath - not least because this is a complete misrepresentation of the process, which was initiated by the Minister for the purposes of ensuring better and more efficient local government, and not in any sense sought by Westmeath County Council.

Changing the boundary would potentially impact on many community groups in their interaction with their local authority, and Roscommon County Council is seen as being proactive and supportive in its engagement with local communities. However, for organic, bottom-up organisations, embedded in local communities, the change would not have any significant impact, as the nature and needs of the communities they serve would not change due to the change in the local authority boundaries.

National organisations based on county structures may feel required to adjust to the new boundary. It would be a matter for these organisations to determine their own preferred structures, along existing or any new county boundary, or otherwise, including in consultation with affected members and clubs in the extended area. This process may be difficult.

5.5 Service Delivery (across the full range of local authority functions envisaged in the Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First and the Local Government Reform Act 2014)

Roscommon County Council has focused significant investment in Monksland/Bellanamullia, with €47m invested in the period 1994-2014\textsuperscript{35}. Given the growth potential of Monksland/Bellanamullia, with 39% of land zoned for industrial development in the county,\textsuperscript{36} it can be anticipated that the area will remain a focus for the Council, with ongoing investment in services into the future.

A range of services and community facilities has been provided in Monksland/Bellanamullia by Roscommon County Council and other State agencies. Nevertheless, there is significant reliance on Athlone as an urban centre and on Westmeath County Council for the provision of certain services (primary and 2\textsuperscript{nd} level schools, fire services, mobile library visits Monksland/Bellanamullia weekly, Garda presence)\textsuperscript{37}. Services in Monksland/Bellanamullia

\textsuperscript{35} Para 3, pg 23 Roscommon submission.

\textsuperscript{36} Table 1 pg 11 Roscommon submission. Next largest percentage is 31%, in Roscommon town. Note that Business, Enterprise Park etc zoning in Monksland is 14%, ranked sixth in the county.

\textsuperscript{37} Pg 24, Roscommon Co Council submission.
are currently limited to the Community Centre with sports pitches and an Astroturf pitch, a playground for young children, a Primary Health Centre and one national school. Most other services provided by a local authority for an area (roads infrastructure, public lighting, footpaths, cycleways, street cleaning, flood management planning, waste management, recycling) are in place in Monksland/Bellanamullia and their enhancement is planned for in the new LAP.

Not changing the boundary (either with or without greater structured cooperation) would mean that Monksland would continue to be a priority for Roscommon County Council and that the emphasis in the Monksland/Bellanamullia LAP 2016-2020 on the provision of better services and local facilities in the area would be realised.

A limitation of keeping the status quo is that Monksland/Bellanamullia suffers from the lack of strong links with Athlone town. The required significant enhancement of a broad range of public services would not be done in an integrated manner with Athlone. There is a significant dearth of recreational and amenity facilities and publicly accessible green space in the area.

A continued focus on providing services in Monksland/Bellanamullia for the residents of the area would miss an opportunity to provide integrated services across the wider Athlone area, to the benefit of the populations of both Monksland/Bellanamullia and Athlone.

Changing the boundary could mean that the services required in an urban area could more effectively and efficiently be provided by a single authority with a responsibility for the area as a whole. An integrated approach would be taken to the provision of services for the area, without risk of duplication or inadvertent omission.

However, changing the boundary would entail a reduction in the size of Roscommon (reduction in 2011 population from approximately 64,100 to 60,200, bringing the local authority down one place from 28th to 29th in the ranking on local authorities by population and a reduction in rates receipts by €1m to approximately €10m). This is seen by Roscommon County Council as having a significant impact on its capacity to deliver services. Nevertheless, Leitrim (the local authority with least population) still manages to provide a full range of services; Roscommon is predominantly a rural county, with skills in providing services to this population structure, and these skills would remain as the county becomes proportionately more rural.

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38 Roscommon Co Council submission, pg 24

39 Roscommon County Council, Monksland / Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2016-2022, p. 13

40 Roscommon County Council, Monksland / Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2016-2022, Appendix 1, p. 5.

41 Roscommon County Council, Monksland / Bellanamullia (Athlone West) Local Area Plan 2016-2022, p. 25
Roscommon currently has one of the highest over-65 year old populations in the country. The dependency ratio in the county would increase even more if there was a boundary change, as the age profile of Monksland/Bellanamullia is significantly younger than the rest of the county. This would impact on the capacity of the county to sustain itself and its services. There is a fear that in becoming merely an adjunct to Athlone, Monksland/Bellanamullia, currently the jewel in the crown of Roscommon, would suffer from reduced prioritisation and reduced investment in services.

There are options to expand on the use of section 85 and 86 agreements and other forms of structural cooperation for the provision of services (e.g. motor tax, library facilities) and the sharing of a range of community facilities where this does not already occur. While there are practical difficulties in implementing greater cooperation through shared services agreements around service delivery, a more integrated approach would overcome some of the limitations of the status quo and boundary change options observed above.

5.6 Governance and Accountability

Irish public policy as it pertains to local government has focused on enhancing governance structures and accountability. The Better Local Government White Paper42 signalled a significant shift in how decisions were to be taken. It outlined the merits of participatory democracy and the need for it to coexist with representative democracy in a strengthened governance system. Structures to support community voice, known as community fora, were established.

The most recent major central government policy on local government, the Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First43, signalled the continuation of the principle of open governance through the establishment of Public Participation Networks and the input of community voice at Local Community Development Committee and Strategic Policy Committee levels.

At international level in recent years the debate on the allocation of power between local government units has centred on the contrast between solutions involving formal hierarchical structures (a ‘government’ model) and those that link organisations horizontally through cooperation, eschewing government entities with jurisdiction over an entire metropolitan model (a ‘governance’ model). The concept of horizontally linked organisations implies that municipal boundaries matter little if local government units can cooperate to provide services and enhance local democracy. Research in the United States suggests that “more and more local governments are resorting to intergovernmental boundary agreements (IBAs) to redraw their jurisdictional borders”44.


43 Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government (2012)

In considering the current assessment on a proposed boundary extension in Athlone, the Committee sought to consider political, community and political voice through the following mechanisms:

- A call for submissions by individuals and groups, including the individual local authorities by means of public advertisement and use of a framework to aid focus on the key issues in the brief;
- Face-to-face meetings with elected members from each county (2 meetings per county) and with officials.

There was no attempt to otherwise measure public or political opinion, as it was the Committee’s view that the above process, which was used elsewhere, was adequate. The results were noteworthy for 2 reasons:

- The quantum of responses (almost 28,000 in total);
- The near-unanimity of the viewpoints against a boundary extension.

In considering the options identified by the Committee, it was clear that retaining the existing boundary (either with or without greater structured cooperation) would mean that the voice of the people of Roscommon would be recognised. It would also give the recently instituted Municipal Districts time to develop their potential. Monksland/Bellanamullia is a key urban component of Roscommon, particularly the Athlone Municipal District. Its loss would significantly erode the county’s urban component and create a predominantly rural Municipal District and County.

Monksland/Bellanamullia is seen as the area of Roscommon with the most potential for further development in the county, having been the beneficiary of strategic choices many years ago to focus investment in this part of the county. Leaving the boundary as is would protect the cohesion of the county as a whole (in addition to protecting the financial viability of the county).

Greater use of section 85 or 86 agreements or other forms of structured cooperation could yield some additional benefits. They could provide an opportunity to develop innovative governance structures across county boundaries that link local authorities and other organisations horizontally. Given the significant opposition by politicians and citizens to a top-down proposal of boundary change being imposed on local government, a good governance model provides an effective means to address issues, even if there would be the likely need for local authorities to devote resources to the early implementation of cooperative agreements.

On the other hand, not changing the boundary would mean that there would be a continued absence of a forum where the unified voice of the people of Athlone could be articulated. Issues relating to the area would continue to be aired in two council chambers. Extending the boundary would entail a more unified representational voice for the people of the greater Athlone area, eliminate overlap of representation (e.g. one housing list for the whole area), and reduce confusion among a minority of citizens living close to the border as to who represents them.
However, the drawbacks of extending the boundary would entail a loss of contact between citizens and existing elected members representing them, tensions between groups during the implementation process, and a deepening of the distrust of our democratic structures that would allow the boundary to be extended against the clear will of the people most directly affected. The Municipal Districts would also have to be redesigned. In particular, there is no alternative large town to Monksland/Bellanamullia in the Athlone Municipal District in Roscommon.

It is likely that the numbers of Councillors in the extended Westmeath would have to be increased by one. A corresponding decrease in representation in Roscommon would lead to a reduction in the number of Councillors to below 18, the minimum number per Council across the country, and would therefore be unlikely.
Chapter 6 Options

a) No Boundary Extension

i) Maintain the Status Quo

It is evident from the preceding chapter that there are many disadvantages in leaving matters as they are. Athlone-Monksland/Bellanamullia has suffered from the lack of a shared vision for the greater urban area, there is poor integration of community facilities, and occasional unhelpful competition between the areas that has the potential to damage the overall fabric of the urban area, particularly the town centre. The potential for the town is not being fully realised due to the lack of coherence in planning the integrated development of the town as a whole by Westmeath and Roscommon County Councils.

Maintenance of the existing boundary would, however, respect the overwhelming wishes of the submissions received from Roscommon people and organisations. That said, without improvements in the governance arrangements between the 2 Councils, the status quo would be preserved at the expense of the sustainable development of Athlone as a whole.

Based on the above, and the considerations in earlier sections, the Committee does not favour this option.

ii) Greater Use of Shared Services

It is recognised that local authorities nationally are developing a suite of shared services, primarily for back-office functions such as payroll, procurement, treasury management, etc. as part of the delivery of greater efficiency in the local government service. Of themselves, these nationally or regionally shared services will not address the issues identified in relation to Athlone-Monksland/Bellanamullia. However, local authorities have now developed skills in devising and implementing such agreements.

There are a number of shared services delivered by one local authority for the other currently delivered across the County boundary, primarily Fire and Emergency Services, which benefit the delivery of these services for the communities in both counties. There is scope for further development of shared services, including motor tax and libraries, using Section 85 of the Local Government Act 2001.

The key shared service that would need to be delivered in a joint manner is the strategic planning function. This would require a joint Development Plan or Local Area Plan for Athlone-Monksland/Bellanamullia, built on an agreed and shared vision for the town. This could be done on the basis of existing planning legislation, with an integrated Development Plan or Local
Area Plan developed jointly by both local authorities and the relevant part of the Plan adopted simultaneously by each local authority. Alternatively, it would be possible to use Section 86 of the Local Government Act 2001 to provide for the joint discharge of this function.

The potential for increased shared services (without acknowledgement of the need to include strategic planning functions) has been recognised by Roscommon County Council as a worthwhile alternative to proceeding with a boundary extension.

There exists in Athlone-Monksland/Bellanamullia an opportunity to create a new model of cooperation, with an innovative governance system built upon the Local Community and Development Committee model. This would include both local authorities, community representatives, and other relevant organisations. Support from central government in creating coherence of delivery for the local citizen requires commitment of central government Departments to ensure all parties buy in to new arrangements.

Based on the above, and the considerations in earlier sections, the Committee favours this option.

b) Adjustment to the Boundary

i) Move the Boundary to the centre of the Shannon
This suggestion has been made in a number of the public submissions, but not in the submissions of either local authority. Reference is made in the relevant submissions to the underdevelopment of that part of Athlone within the remit of Westmeath County Council west of the Shannon and to the idea that the River Shannon is the natural provincial and county boundary.

Athlone has historically developed on both sides of the River, and it is not clear that this suggestion has the support of the inhabitants immediately concerned. The transfer of the area west of the River to Roscommon would not address the key requirement for an integrated planning framework for the town as a whole. It also has the potential to exacerbate the problems caused by the lack of the necessary integrated approach.

Based on the above, and the considerations in earlier sections, the Committee does not favour this option.

ii) Boundary Extension to include the whole of the Area of Interest
As explained at section 3.1.1, the Area of Interest was defined to assist in the public understanding of the scope of work of the Committee and was not intended to be the only option for a new boundary to be assessed.
The Area of Interest includes both the development envelope for Monksland/Bellanamullia and an extensive rural area that is not contemplated for development as part of either Athlone or Monksland/Bellanamullia now or in any prospective future. The boundary of the AOI, being indicative for a specific purpose, follows no natural features. It is not a logical boundary for any extension of Westmeath into Roscommon.

Hodson Bay/Barrymore were not included in the Area of Interest (see section 4.2), and the Committee has identified no reason why this area should be included in County Westmeath, should the boundary be extended.

Based on the above, and the considerations in earlier sections, the Committee does not favour this option.

iii) **Boundary Extension to include part of the Area of Interest**

Given the requirement for a shared vision and Development Plan for Athlone-Monksland/Bellanamullia, any extension of the boundary of County Westmeath into County Roscommon should be centred on the current and envisaged development envelope of Monksland/Bellanamullia as set out in the 2016-22 LAP. Also included in any such area should be the line of the indicative link road along the northern fringe of the zoned lands in the LAP as far as the N6 bridge over the Shannon, including the on and off ramps for Junction 12 on the N6

This option has considerable merit. Based on the considerations in earlier sections, however, and subject to demonstrable cooperation in accordance with the recommendations in the following Chapter, the Committee does not favour this option.
In finalising its recommendations, the Committee has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the issues raised; the documentation provided; international best practice; and government policy at national, regional and local levels. The huge volume of submissions necessitated an arduous but fruitful process to distil the many perspectives advanced by the citizenry. The views of the elected members were elicited both by way of formal submissions and by dialogue through 4 separate meetings. All of the above were considered in the context of the terms of reference provided by the Minister. The Committee also availed of the individual skills and experience of its members, which were augmented by the support provided by the Institute of Public Administration. The Committee’s recommendations are as follows.

The Committee recommends that no change be made to the existing boundary. In doing so, it acknowledges the many strong arguments in favour of a boundary extension.

As a part of the “no boundary change” recommendation, the Committee, drawing on its experience of good governance in local government and on the in-depth knowledge of the key stakeholders, adds the following crucial proviso: that the process of planned and structured cooperation between the two local authorities for the future planning and delivery of services in the combined Athlone-Monksland/Bellanamullia area be immediately accelerated to deliver sustainable development for Athlone. The Committee has been impressed by the quality and approach of elected members and officials from both authorities, including a willingness to engage in a positive manner to address the weaknesses that currently exist and so allow the town of Athlone to reach its potential as an entity.

Specifically, the Committee recommends that the 2 authorities, working together, will produce:

- A unified vision for Athlone;
- A Joint Local Area Plan for Athlone- Monksland/Bellanamullia incorporating this vision in a comprehensive strategy for the sustainable development of Athlone, including social, cultural, environmental and economic development. This may necessitate variations to the Roscommon County Development Plan 2014-2020 as a Local Area Plan may not contravene its parent Development Plan;
- A joint retail strategy for the town for Athlone- Monksland/Bellanamullia;
- A joint initiative to improve community cohesion and develop an identity of belonging to Athlone for all citizens while retaining current Roscommon and Westmeath identities as part of the above process;
- A report detailing the results of a comprehensive review of service delivery of all local authority services and functions analysed as a totality (as per the recommendation of paragraph 6.4.2(c) of the Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First) and as individual services with a view to
creating efficiency, effectiveness and coherence of delivery to the communities and citizens of Athlone who ultimately should be able to access almost all services locally. This will lead to the preparation of a Service Delivery Plan;

- An analysis of services delivered by other bodies, e.g. IDA, Enterprise Ireland, HSE, including recommendations to Government for delivery on an Athlone - Monksland/Bellanamullia basis where deemed appropriate.

In making the above recommendations to the Minister, the Committee is reluctant to suggest binding time scales for their implementation. It recognises that unforeseen circumstances may delay such processes. However, given the urgency of the need for a coherent approach to the future sustainable development of Athlone, it suggests the following as being reasonable:

1. Joint Retail Strategy – 18 months from publication of this report;
2. Joint Local Area Plan – 24 months from publication of this report;
3. Service delivery analyses and Plan– 9 months from publication of this report;
4. Implementation of Service Delivery Changes – progressively from completion of this Service Delivery Plan and completion within 3 years from date of the Plan.

Roscommon and Westmeath County Councils should provide to the Minister a Joint Implementation Plan within 6 months of the publication of this report to indicate their proposals and timelines for completion of these tasks, and thereafter provide joint annual reports to him or her on progress in their implementation. In the event of substantial non-completion of the above four tasks within a four-year period, it is the view of this Committee that the boundary be extended in order to achieve coherent sustainable development for Athlone.
Appendix 1
Terms of Reference

Athlone Boundary Committee

Terms of Reference

1. The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government hereby establishes the Athlone Boundary Committee under section 28 of the Local Government Act 1991, hereinafter referred to as “the Committee”.

2. The following persons are hereby appointed as members of the Committee:

   – Jack Keyes (Chair);
   – Donal Enright and
   – Ger Sheeran. 45

3. The Committee shall be independent in the performance of its functions and shall stand dissolved on submission of its final report to the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

4. In accordance with sections 32 and 33 of the Local Government Act 1991, the Committee is hereby required to:

   - carry out a review of the boundary between County Westmeath and County Roscommon;
   - make such recommendations with respect to that boundary, and any consequential recommendations with respect to the area of the Municipal District of Athlone, that it considers to be necessary in the interests of effective and convenient local government; and
   - prepare and furnish to the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, a report in writing of that review and its recommendations.

5. In the event of a recommendation that the boundary between County Westmeath and County Roscommon and the area of the Municipal District of Athlone should be altered, the report shall contain relevant supporting information, analysis and rationale relating to or arising from such recommendation, including the following matters: -

   (a) The financial and other relevant implications, including the potential outcomes to be achieved, and likely benefits and costs.
   (b) Any significant issues that are considered likely to arise in the implementation of revised arrangements and how these should be addressed.

45 The original membership included Joe Allen and Ciaran Lynch prior to the appointment of Donal Enright and Ger Sheeran.
(c) Measures that should be taken consequential to or in the context of the recommended arrangements, including any measures in relation to financial arrangements.

(d) Any matters in relation to which provision should be made in a primary order or a supplementary order (providing for matters arising from, in consequence of, or related to, the boundary extension) within the meaning of section 34 of the Local Government Act 1991, including any financial adjustments required.

(e) Any interim measures which should be taken, if necessary, in advance of, or in preparation for, the full implementation of the recommendations.

(f) The appropriate timescale for implementation of recommendations, including any interim measures.

6. In carrying out its review and formulating its recommendations, the Committee shall address the following matters in particular, insofar as relevant to the requirements of articles (4) and (5):

(a) The need to take full account of:

(i) current demographic and relevant spatial and socio-economic factors, including settlement and employment patterns;
(ii) detailed information to be provided by the relevant local authorities in relation to their structure, services, finances and operations or other matters relevant to the Committee’s functions;
(iii) Government policy in relation to local government as set out in the Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First, and in relation to the public service and the public finances.

(b) The need to maximise efficiency and value for money in local government.

(c) The need to ensure that the arrangements recommended are financially sustainable and will not result in an ongoing additional cost to central Government through increased subvention.

(d) Staffing, organisational, representational, financial, service delivery and other relevant implications or requirements.

(e) The need to ensure effective local government for Athlone and its hinterland, with particular regard to the need to maximise the economic performance and potential of the area; to facilitate the delivery of efficient and good value local authority services; and to ensure effective and accountable democratic representation.

(f) The need to have regard to the identity and cohesion of local communities.

(g) Any weaknesses in current local authority arrangements or operations that need to be addressed.

(h) Any additional matters that the Minister may specify.

7. The Committee shall make such recommendations with respect to the requirements at (4) and (5) and (6) as it considers necessary in the interests of effective and efficient local government. It shall prepare and furnish to the Minister, no later than 31st March 2016, a report, in writing, of its review and recommendations, which the Minister shall publish.
ATHLONE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE PUBLIC NOTICE AND INVITATION OF SUBMISSIONS

Review of the administrative boundary in Athlone between County Westmeath and County Roscommon

Part V of the Local Government Act 1991

Notice is hereby given that Mr Alan Kelly TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government has established a Boundary Committee to carry out a review of the local government boundary in Athlone between County Westmeath and County Roscommon and to prepare a report under Part V of the Local Government Act 1991.

The terms of reference, details of members of the Committee, guidance on the making of submissions, maps and other information are available on www.athloneboundaryreview.ie

The Boundary Committee is independent in the performance of its functions. The task of the Committee is to identify the most appropriate administrative boundary between the two Councils concerned which would be required in the interests of effective and convenient Local Government. The application of any changes to the administrative boundaries by sporting or other cultural bodies would be a matter for the bodies themselves.

Submissions, in writing, are invited in relation to the boundary review. Submissions should be provided via the Review website at www.athloneboundaryreview.ie using the template provided. Alternatively, or in addition, submissions in writing can be made to the undersigned. Submissions should be received not later than 5pm on Wednesday 27 January 2016 and will be published on or after this date on the Review website.

Following consideration of submissions relevant to the terms of reference, and of the outcomes of such consultation as may be carried out by the Committee, the Committee will make such recommendations with respect to the administrative boundary of County Westmeath/County Roscommon and any consequent recommendations that they consider

See link to the Public Notice at http://www.athloneboundaryreview.ie/Press,Releases/Title,19585,en.html
to be necessary in the interests of effective and convenient local government in due course. The Committee will prepare and furnish to the Minister a report in writing of that review and its recommendations.

The Terms of Reference, for the Boundary Committee and a map, showing the existing boundary and the Committee’s area of interest are on display for public inspection at the offices of Westmeath County Council and Roscommon County Council.

The address for written submissions is:

Lourda Giles,

Athlone Boundary Review Secretariat,

Westmeath County Council,

Áras an Chontae,

Mount Street,

Mullingar,

County Westmeath.

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Appendix 3

Standard Framework for Evaluation

*Standard Framework for Evaluation*

for

*Local Authority Boundary Reviews*

for

Athlone, Carlow, Drogheda and Waterford

*As developed and adopted by the Boundary Review Committees*

13th November 2015
Overview

The following is a summary of the information to be assembled as an evaluation framework to be used for the purposes of meeting the requirements of the Terms of Reference.

The framework will comprise three sections:-

**Background Documentation, Detailed Evidence Base** and material derived from the **Public Consultation** process.

Each of these is described as follows:

1. **Background Documentation:**
   This is general contextual and background information in documentary form compiled to provide the Committee with sufficient reference sources to undertake its work.

2. **Detailed Evidence Base:** This component must provide the Committee with the necessary quantum of data to enable an assessment of the extent to which any revision of the statutory boundary between authorities will change the means whereby services are provided for the people in the areas so revised, including the practical impact of such revisions on the economic development and community cohesion of the areas, as well as on the operation of both authorities.

3. **Public Consultation:** The process of public consultation will inform the work of the Committees of the range of opinions of people’s perception of the impact of any revisions to the administrative boundary between the respective Local Authorities.

   Public submissions will be particularly important in this regard as well as the views of those in elected office as representatives of the people in the area under consideration. A website is in place for the convenience of making on-line submissions.

   The Committee especially requests that people respond to the questions assembled by the Committee for ease of assimilation of views under particular headings. People are by no means to be confined to making responses under those headings alone but may submit any opinion or material they wish that is relevant to the remit of the Committee within its Terms of Reference as set out by the Minister.

   *There will be some overlap between material requested in Background Documentation and Detailed Evidence Base sections. The local authorities may cross-reference where such information is provided under one or other heading where this happens so as to avoid having to insert, or read, the same information in two places.*
1. **Background Documentation**

The respective local authorities are asked to provide the following documentation, although they are not limited to same. These will be provided in electronic formats in the first instance. All documentation, in hard-copy format, must be assembled by each authority and held in a “data room” so that it can be made available on request for the Committee.

Each Local Authority is to submit the following information - insofar as it applies to the identified Area of Interest outlined by the Committee - a Summary Document that comprises analysis of organisation-wide Policies, Plans, Strategies, Budgets, Workforce and general Resource Deployment,. This includes such matters as

1.1 The Council Corporate Plan, Workforce Plans, Municipal District Budgets and associated Implementation Plans, Services provided through relevant Municipal District, Schedule of Municipal District Works for Town in respect of Parks and Open Spaces, housing maintenance, road maintenance, street sweeping and litter management.
   In addition, the Committee requests transactional analysis for relevant MD (incl. housing rental income, motor tax, payments, library visits, sports centre visits, parking fines, litter fines.

1.2 Available plans, proposals etc of State agencies having a bearing on the Area of Interest in terms of economic and/or community development (e.g. EI, IDA Ireland, HSE, Regional Authority/Authorities, LEADER)

1.3 County / City Development Plans, Local Areas Plans or any statutory Land-use or Transportation Plans that may be relevant – including draft or lapsed documents (the committee requests copies of the documents in draft or if they are lapsed and will give appropriate consideration these, given the status of each, as may be relevant).

1.4 Democratic representation - Local Representatives by electoral area.

1.5 Population Profile and Census Statistics: Data is available on statistics for the overall context assembled by the CSO – termed “Area Profiles”. Links to this database output should be assembled and, insofar as it is practically possible to do so, a comparative analysis of this data and that for the Area of Interest should be compiled. The headings used by the CSO in their “Area Profiles” should be used for this purpose. Small Area statistical data, in addition, will be particularly useful information for the Committee in this regard.

1.6 Mapping and Statistics:
Both Local Authorities are requested to cooperate to assemble a Land-use Zoning Map for the Area of Interest that uses the Land-use categorisation developed for MyPlan so as to have common zoning references available for both authority areas.
The authorities are requested to provide an analysis of the sequential development of the contiguous urban areas, in both their areas, by decade, over the past 70 years in particular, to aid the Committee’s understanding of the sequential development of the general area.

Separate mapping of land in public ownership should be provided to include local authority lands, lands in ownership of the state and its agencies e.g. the CIE group (Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann), IDA, Development Agencies etc..

Maps should be provided to identify CSO and DED Boundaries, referenced so as to be associated with population distribution, offices, facilities and depots under the control of the local authorities. These maps should also identify the functional areas in use by state agencies serving the population e.g. Garda Síochána districts, HSE districts and areas, public transport routes and termini.

In addition the Councils are requested to provide the latest aerial photography available for the Area of Interest.

2. Detailed Evidence Base

The following table provides indicative data by which each of the Terms of Reference requirements may be evaluated. It is not intended to be exhaustive and the consultation process may propose other data, hence the process will be iterative until a final evidence base is available. In preparing the following, the Committee has taken into consideration the relevant recommendations of the Report of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group (2010).

Terms of Reference Requirement:

a) **Current demographic and relevant spatial and socio-economic factors, including settlement and employment patterns**

Indicative Data:
- Relative levels of deprivation (Pobal)
- Levels of unemployment relative to the average in both Local Authorities
- Evidence of joint development planning
- Current and target population in overall settlement (LAs)
  - Availability of land to accommodate such a population
  - Service and enterprise land needed for such a population
  - Availability of such land and current zoning

b) **Structure, services, finances and operation of the relevant local authorities**

(This information overlaps with some of the Background Documentation outlined above)
- Staff assigned to the area in question/per head of population relative to the average in each Local Authority (LAs)
- Evidence of collaboration between the two local authorities in the following areas:
Development Plans (Joint/Collaborative Plans and Actions for the purpose of coordination such as joint Retail Strategies, Transport Strategies, Infrastructure Strategies and the like)

- Road Maintenance and Road Safety Programme arrangement,
- Water infrastructure (supply and waste) provision;
- Housing: Social housing collaboration for the purposes of addressing housing need (joint or separate housing lists, the efficient use of housing stock, alignment of housing policies to address housing demand and homeless services), joint housing and associated community facility projects,
- Commercial Rates – comparative analysis of Commercial Rates between local authority areas and the extent of the Commercial Rate Base within each existing local authority area – including the income derived therefrom. base of the area of interest
- Emergency Services arrangements including the how the arrangements around Major Emergency Planning are jointly coordinated.
- The extent of existing or proposed shared service arrangements in general that may not be covered under any of the headings outlined here.

c) **Government Policy in relation to Local Government, the public service and the public finances**

Details are requested as to how overall policy in the following areas is coordinated and/or impacts on the Area of Interest in particular under the headings:

- Action Programme for Effective Local Government
- Action Plan for Jobs
- Regional Planning requirements

d) **Need to maximize efficiency and value for money in local government**

Responses under this heading will have been addressed under other headings as requested above. The local authorities are asked that, through the other indicators and through submissions they address what they regards as opportunities to achieve specific savings.

- Both local authorities are invited to provide an initial outline of the impact of any change in boundary on the practical administration of their area as a consequence of either the gaining of additional contiguous area or the loss of such an area. These analyses should extend to the impact on their services that may be delivered from a base or bases outside the Area of Interest and also to how they see that services outside that area might need to be reconfigured as a consequence of loss or gain.
- Are there savings or costs that would be envisaged over and above those arising from existing collaboration?
- Are there financial performance indicators e.g. relative level of and/or collection rates/arrears of LPT that are relevant in this regard?
- Any plans/projects of either local authority, within the Area of Interest, that are being hampered by the current arrangements or for which the existing boundary arrangements have no relevance?
• LA view of managing or providing services in an area not under its control if such exist (e.g. housing, water, waste-water). This issue could be one for either authority. (LAs)

e) Need to ensure arrangements recommended are financially sustainable and will not result in ongoing additional cost to central Government

Both local authorities must set out the extent to which the following may arise as a result of any changes boundary configurations:
• Outstanding debts and rates, development levies and property.
• Commercial Rates differential and compensation between Councils that may be implied as a result of changes – to varying degrees of extent as may be postulated in such submissions.
• Are there implications, in the opinion of any party, for impact on central government funding as it is specifically required that any change involves no additional ongoing costs to central government?
• Relative levels of expenditure / income per head in area under review relative to average in both authorities.

f) Staffing, organizational, representational, financial, service delivery and other relevant implications or requirements

Estimated potential financial costs/savings resulting from recommendations is to be assembled as a summary by each local authority.

Each local authority should submit its opinion on the implications of any change for local representation.

Each local authority should submit its case on how service delivery will be affected in the Area of Interest and in any area contiguous to that location, to include change requirement associated with offices, depots and council facilities as relevant in the opinion of the authority.

Finally an overall assessment of the implications for staff resourcing for each local authority that will affect continuing service delivery to the community in area where change may arise.

g) Need to ensure effective local government for the ‘Town’ (or city as may be the case) and its hinterland with particular regard to need to maximize the economic performance and potential of the area; to facilitate the delivery of efficient and good value local authority services; and to ensure effective and accountable democratic representation

Each local authority should outline its view of the implications for:
• enterprise development including FDI of having an existing area extended under the remit of the neighbouring local authority;
• wider economic development, both in terms of the development of the city/town itself and the impact on the economic development of the wider hinterland served by the city/town, and where relevant, in a regional context;
• political governance and the functioning of local democracy. This includes issues such as local political oversight and accountability, and the role and arrangement of municipal district, to include current political representation of the areas under review and the implications of any changes for this representation;
• the extent to which the population may perceive alienation or to be otherwise marginalised in a new context and how the electorate will perceive an affect on the most effective and efficient delivery of local authority services in their area;
• access to LA services and a need to travel for such services and whether there is or will continue to be a local area service office provided, including if there are implications for population adjacent to new boundary of the withdrawal of such a service office.

h) The need to have regard to the identity and cohesion of local communities

Each authority is requested to outline levels of civil society activity/volunteering/local organisations (Census/Volunteer Centre). They may highlight the extent to which the activities of each is associated with existing local authority boundary configurations. This should include an account of how, in the opinion of each authority, any change on existing boundary arrangements may impact on any such identified group or activity, and where relevant, on wider social and community coherence and needs.

In support of arguments in any direction (for or against change) some demonstration of how local authorities are enabled to leverage community actions and/or local innovation to improve local areas or otherwise should be submitted. Any such case cited should robustly show this may have real or marginal relevance in the context the most effective and efficient delivery of local authority services to the residents and business interests.

i) Are there any weaknesses in current local authority arrangements or operations that need to be addressed?

Are there, or have there been any difficulties in collaboration between local authorities experienced by either authority in the past?

Are there plans/projects of either local authority which are not possible to be fully implemented to the extent that might otherwise be the case or is either local authority being specifically constrained or hampered by the current arrangements?
The following provides a template (and related guidance) for inclusion on the respective boundary review websites which are in addition to the public notice text (see code provided by Waterford City and County Council).

**Make a Submission**

To make a submission please complete the form below as it helps to guide you through the main points that the Review Committee has to consider in making its recommendation to the Minister.

You may any other points you wish in addition and you may add references to reports or evidence you believe to be relevant to the consideration of the Boundary Review.

**Please Note:**

*The submission deadline is xx xx 2015. The maximum file size you may upload with this form is 8Mb.*

You should know that all submissions made will be publicly available on this website at the end of the public consultation period. Your contact details are required to ensure transparency regarding the consultation process and to allow us to contact you should there be a need for clarification regarding the content of your submission.

The addresses, email addresses and phone numbers of private individuals will not be published on the website, and subject to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act, will not be released otherwise.

Name:

Address:

Email Address:

Daytime Contact phone number:

Area in which you reside (for publication instead of specific address).
To aid our work the Review Committee would be grateful to receive your answers to any or all of the following questions:

**Question 1** How might alteration of the boundary help or hinder the retention or creation of employment and the general economic performance of the area?

**Text Box to be inserted to receive answers to each question.**

**Question 2** How might the alteration of the boundary help or hinder the identity or cohesion of local communities in the area?

**Question 3** How might alteration of the boundary help or hinder delivery of services by local government to ensure that the needs of the local community are met now and in the future?

**Question 4** How might alteration of the administrative boundary help or hinder the need to maximise efficiency and value for money in local government?

**Question 5** How might alteration of the boundary help or hinder the Planning and Development needs, as administered by the local authority, of the community?

**Question 6** How might alteration of the boundary help or hinder the delivery of effective and accountable democratic representation?

**Question 7** What strengths or weaknesses do you see in current local authority administrative boundary arrangements in the area?

**You may Upload a file here**, if you wish to provide supporting documentation for points made in response to these questions or in relation to any matter you believe to be relevant to the task assigned to the Boundary Review Committee.

**Box to be inserted to receive submissions**