

From: Councillor Mary Roche
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To: Boundary Review
Subject: SUBMISSION TO THE WATERFORD BOUNDARY REVIEW COMMISSION

SUBMISSION TO THE WATERFORD BOUNDARY REVIEW COMMISSION ON BEHALF OF WATERFORD INDEPENDENT COUNCILLORS MARY ROCHE, LAURENCE 'CHA' O'NEILL & DAVID DANIELS

The proposed extension of the Waterford boundary into Kilkenny which the committee is tasked with examining is undoubtedly the correct decision for the people currently living in that area and indeed for all the people of the wider region. A single authority, driving social, cultural and economic development with no boundary artificially limiting that focus and growth would deliver the best outcome across any matrix you care to examine in the South East Region.

We are aware that detailed demographics & financial details etc. will be contained in the submission by Waterford City & County Council. However we wish to make some general points to be considered by the commission.

In a nutshell the extension of the boundary would merely regularise an anomaly which has arisen whereby much of the population of Waterford CITY who live on the northern side of the city happen to live in a part which has expanded into South County Kilkenny. This means that the people of that area are on the extreme edges of the administrative area of Kilkenny county council when, if they were to be administered by Waterford City & County Council they would immediately be right at the centre of that administration. This would have huge benefits in terms of convenience, efficiency and visibility for the area under review.

Any cursory look at the area being examined would determine that in no way can it be said to be an example of effective or efficient local government. There has been virtually no investment by the local authority in the area over decades and indeed with its' proximity to the city it could be argued that the suburb should have naturally developed to a far greater extent than it currently has. Kilkenny County Council, for example, has not built one social house in the area – ever. This, despite Ferrybank being the second largest urban area in the then Kilkenny County Council area after Callan. All Local Authority tenants in Ferrybank are tenants of Waterford Council, despite the fact that the Council cannot even sweep the streets in 'their' estates.

Placing the area into Waterford would ensure that any bias towards it as a result of being on the periphery would in time be addressed by local service delivery, increased centrality and increased political representation. Despite some (lately given) commitment from Kilkenny (to locate a playground in Ferrybank for example) it is obvious that Ferrybank and environs have been neglected for many years.

The Waterford Division of An Garda Síochána already covers the exact area being examined by the committee. A boundary extension would regularise the Garda/Local Authority boundary and it makes common sense to have the entire area out as far as the by-pass also covered by Waterford Council. The Department of Social Protection offices on the Cork Road in Waterford City also serve that area of South Kilkenny.

It would also, in time regularise the delivery of a myriad of services to that area by many organisations which run into difficulty with the current boundary alignment. Indeed there has been considerable complication for many Waterford organisations who work in the greater Ferrybank area if they happen to be physically located outside the current boundary. It is a ludicrous situation and pertains for example to two projects based just outside the current Waterford boundary run by Waterford Area Partnership and historically funded via FAS in Waterford. Both projects were initiated and continue to be managed by Waterford Area Partnership but are now funded via Kilkenny/Carlow Education Training Board because the rented space for the projects just happens to be outside the city boundary. This creates difficulties with sourcing funding, reporting lines, duplication, evaluation and accountability, for instance.

This in turn highlights another untenable situation whereby disadvantaged people and communities are supposed to access and source help from organisations other than the local authority, based an hour away in Kilkenny city rather than from their 'local' city centre, which is on their doorstep in Waterford. This is surely a factor in hindering communities, especially already disadvantaged and excluded communities, from accessing adequate or fair assistance.

When the then Waterford City sought a boundary extension back in 2005 the rate base in the relevant area of South Kilkenny was circa €1.5 million. The rate base currently stands at circa €1.8 million from our information. If the distribution of funds in South Kilkenny was fairly allocated, all of this would be spent on the area, plus a portion of

the local government fund as well as any separate grant funding. I don't think anyone would, or could, claim that this is the case – meaning that South Kilkenny is severely disadvantaged in terms of getting its fair share within the county. Interestingly, even those who advocate against the boundary extension will admit that Ferrybank and environs do not get a fair share of the Kilkenny financial cake or economic development pie.

The Port of Waterford with its economic potential also rests within the area. Interesting in terms of maximising the economic potential of the port, to note that not one cent of their own money was invested in the access road to the port by Kilkenny County Council - a situation which is telling in its own right. That necessitated the National Roads Authority having to build the road – the shortest primary route in the country – even with its own number, the N29. We have no doubt that the Port of Waterford at Bellview which historically was the City's port and is the very reason for the City's existence and the adjoining economic zone would be much greater priorities for Waterford City & County Council – which already has a major water treatment plant for the city located there. Kilkenny County Council has always and no doubt continues to focus the majority of its development on Kilkenny city where it is headquartered.

Kilkenny County Council persisted for decades in refusing to upgrade or improve the main Dublin Waterford Road or at least the portion from Kilkenny City to Waterford which was commonly acknowledged as the worst inter-city route in the Country. (The part which is north of Kilkenny City was heavily invested in by comparison.) Indeed it could easily be argued that it was as a result of this type of action that the delivery of national inter-city routes had to be taken from the remit of Local Authorities and placed with an independent body where local rivalries would no longer be a decider in persisting with not developing national primary routes merely to disadvantage ones' neighbours!

Another prime and much more recent example of the antipathy of Kilkenny County Council towards Waterford is the white elephant of the Ferrybank Shopping Centre. A monstrosity built (inexplicably) directly adjacent to one of the busiest commuter routes in the country. The fact that the centre came to be located where it is, stands as an example of the worst practices in both strategic planning and planning that persisted in any County or beyond. A centre which is demonstrably far too large for a location with approximately 5,000-6,000 people can only have been conceived and implemented by a Council with not just no interest in what damage it might do to the retail product of the immediately adjacent Waterford City Centre but indeed little care for what consequences it might have for the local community – which lost viable neighbourhood centres as a result of its implementation. It now stands, practically empty, as a monument to the madness of some planning decisions which were badly (or maliciously?) conceived and implemented.

That the anchor tenant would persist in fighting an expensive legal action rather than open there is informative. It is probable that without the then Minister at the Department of the Environment providing the money to the local authority for the opening and staffing of a local area office in the shopping centre it would remain entirely empty to this day (while a national staffing embargo was in place for all Councils!) .

We relate these anecdotes to indicate the damage which has been done and/or attempted to be done to Waterford City to hamper its growth and potential in recent decades and to indicate that despite any claimed conversion to co-operation, we do not expect any change in the culture, as demonstrated by the policies, whether stated or not, of recent decades. Any words to the contrary lately echo very hollow when judged in the light of those actions.

We would also respectfully suggest that, despite the rhetoric, there remains a very significant and sizable - though perhaps subdued in light of the tone of some of the debate - cohort of residents who would favour a boundary extension (or who are indifferent). Perhaps their view should be established in a verifiable manner.

We have no doubt whatsoever that the area under review in South Kilkenny would be better served, better planned and more coherently developed if it was administered by Waterford City & County Council. We also have no doubt that Waterford would deliver much more if it were not curtailed by out dated boundaries which have caused unbalanced development whereby it has almost reached the maximum extent of development to the south of the River Suir while north of the river remains under-developed.

Finally we are convinced that this arrangement would be a far more efficient and cost effective method for delivering local government in the area. While it would not cost any less, especially in light of historic under investment.

The people of South Kilkenny could certainly expect a warm welcome from the people of Waterford as well as a far better delivery of services with vastly improved ease of access. There is far more that unites us than divides us and I am sure that arrangements could be made by other bodies (sporting or otherwise) to facilitate people's preferred loyalties!

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