



**Submission to the Constituency Commission as approved by the Members of Tipperary County Council at their meeting held on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2016;**

At a meeting of Tipperary County Council held on the 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2016, the Members resolved:

*“That having regard to the very significant dissatisfaction and sense of disenfranchisement by the electorate arising from the recent re-drawing of Dáil constituency boundaries involving the transfer of 24 electoral divisions with a population of 10,953 persons from Tipperary to the Offaly constituency, we the Members of Tipperary County Council request the Chief Executive;*

*1. To write to the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government outlining the extent of dissatisfaction and the adverse impact on the electorate of the division of the county for the purpose of elections to Dáil Eireann and request that he introduce measures, including if necessary legislative measures, to ensure the primacy of county boundaries in the delineation of Dáil constituency boundaries and;*

*2. To prepare a written submission for consideration by the Members of Tipperary County Council to be made to the next Constituency Commission and following its call for written submissions.*

*We further request that a copy of this Notice of Motion be circulated to all local authorities whose functional areas are divided by Dáil constituency boundaries”.*

**Background : Tipperary, A Unified County.**

Arising from a decision of Government in 2011 which was subsequently given statutory effect by the Local Government (Reform) Act, 2014, Tipperary was unified through the amalgamation of the former North and South Tipperary County Councils. Tipperary County Council was established as the single local authority for Tipperary on the 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2014 replacing the former North and South Tipperary County Councils, Clonmel Borough Council and Town Councils in Nenagh, Thurles, Carrick on Suir, Tipperary, Cashel and Templemore. This transformation in the county represented a historic and major reform of local government arrangements to Tipperary.

However, this transformation process was not confined to the local government sector. The process signalled the commencement of a more unified service on an all-county basis across a range of public and private service providers. The message of “one county, one community” was integral to mobilising public awareness of the strengths of operating as a single united county.

While appreciating the constraints on the terms of reference of the Commission, the recommendation of the Constituency Commission Report 2012 in relation to Tipperary and the subsequent decision involving the transfer of twenty-four electoral divisions, with a



population of 10,953 in the north-west of the county to the new Offaly constituency has negatively impacted on the transformation of the county to a single entity. It has also given rise to a very real sense of disenfranchisement by persons living in the geographic area which has been transferred. The area referred to, and now located in the Constituency of Offaly, is wholly located within the geographic area of the Nenagh Municipal District as provided in the Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee Report and is inextricably linked to the town of Nenagh in terms of public service, business, social, cultural and community provision.

This Council requests that the Constituency Commission recommend, in your forthcoming Report, the establishment of the entire geographic area of Tipperary within a single constituency giving the strongest possible weight to the requirement in your terms of reference at 1 (c): "The breaching of county boundaries shall be avoided as far as practicable".

The Council argues this approach on the basis that

- a) **County Identity:** defines who you are and what you represent and it is a key characteristic of how Tipperary people view their civic geography.

The citizens of Tipperary have a strong sense of place which underpins and strengthens engagement and participation in the electoral process. It has been very evident since the last General Elections, how the citizens of a portion of north-west Tipperary, who were included in the revised Offaly constituency, have felt a sense of disenfranchisement in having to vote in a constituency in which they have no stake in terms of their day to day lives.

- b) **Consistency in Policy Approaches:** It is critical that the policy decision of Government in 2011 (*which was given statutory recognition in the Local Government (Reform) Act, 2014*) on the unification of Tipperary be applied consistently and reflected in the establishment of Tipperary within a single constituency. Tipperary County Council was established in June 2014 as a result of the merger of the former North and South Tipperary County Councils. The merger happened within the context of an extensive programme of public service cost reduction and also the *Putting People First* local government reforms. The creation of Tipperary County Council was a significant project encompassing the political merger of the two former County Councils, seven Borough/Town councils, and the administrative merger of approximately 1,000 staff. As stated, this process has signalled the commencement of a more unified service on an all-county basis across a range of public and private service providers. Given the scale of the changes involved, adjusting over time to the new reality is critically important and keeping the county as one unified boundary will help to foster and cement the unification of Tipperary as one county.



- c) **The Primacy of the County:** County Tipperary is the largest inland county in Ireland with a population of 160,441 and covering an area of 4,282 square kilometres. Tipperary is one of the most developed agricultural areas in Ireland and some of the world’s best known stud farms and racing stables are based in Tipperary. The existing county towns of Clonmel and Nenagh are located at opposite ends of Tipperary and provide strong economic and social focal points for the county. The towns of Cahir, Carrick on Suir, Cashel, Roscrea, Templemore, Thurles and Tipperary, which function as service centres for their local hinterland, are also crucial to the fabric of the county. Overall, the extensive network of towns in Tipperary helps to ensure strong economic, social and community linkages throughout the county. Within this, it is critical that towns are not separated from the rural hinterlands which they serve and in which there is a vital interdependency.
- d) **Constituency Variance:** The previous Commission was not able to comply fully with its statutory terms of reference on the basis of adherence to county boundaries alone. From that point, it became inevitable that county boundaries would be breached in some constituencies. The Commission recommended no change in 11 constituencies while changes were recommended in a number of constituencies including Tipperary. The previous constituencies of Tipperary North (3 seats) and Tipperary South (3 seats) were replaced with a single 5 seat Tipperary constituency which excluded a geographic area in north west Tipperary which was transferred to and became part of a new 3 seat Offaly constituency. This area included twenty four electoral divisions with a population of 10,593

Based on the preliminary population count of 4,757,976 persons and the current total of 158 TDs the average number of persons per TD for the country as a whole now sits at 30,114, above the constitutional limit of 30,000. Increasing the number of TD’s to 159, gives a national average of 29,924;

The following table shows the relevant statistics for a unified Tipperary based on the 2016 Census preliminary results:

Constituency	Number of TD’s	2016 Preliminary Population	Population per TD	Variance from National Average Population per TD of 29,928 (%)
Tipperary	5	160,441	32,088	+20164 (+7.2)

Having regard to the statutory constraint’s set out in the Electoral Act 1997 within which the Boundary Commission must operate, namely,

- That each constituency shall return three, four or five members
- the breaching of county boundaries shall be avoided “*as far as practicable*”
- each constituency is composed of contiguous areas



- there shall be regard to geographic considerations including significant physical features and the “**extent and the density of population in each constituency**”
- Subject to the provisions of Section 6 of the Act, the Commission shall endeavour to maintain continuity in relation to the arrangement of constituencies.

This Council would request that consideration be given to allowing as an exception a constituency variance exceeding 5% while maintaining the existing 5 seat constituency in the case of Tipperary, thereby allowing it to be re-established as a single unified constituency;

To further support this Council’s submission, it is the view of the Council that if the breaching of county boundaries is to be avoided or minimised, further considerations which might apply include:

- **Constitutional amendment** to give primacy to the retention of county boundaries or combination of whole counties (as opposed to the ratio of members of Dáil Éireann to population) as the basis of the delineation of constituency boundaries.
- **Statutory amendment/revision to the Electoral Act, 1997** (as amended) to strengthen the county boundary as the basis for the delineation of constituency boundaries. This would involve the replacement of the “as far as practicable” test currently contained in the legislation by defining a set of circumstances or conditions providing for the primacy of the county boundary within the Constituency Committees’ Statutory Terms of Reference.

Tipperary County Council fully acknowledges the parameters within which the Commission must operate, particularly the Constitutional ratios which circumscribe the ratio of Deputies to population. Notwithstanding these constraints, the Elected Members of Tipperary, acting for and on behalf of the citizens of the now fully merged county of Tipperary, urge that the Commission recommend the establishment of Tipperary within a single unified constituency thereby avoiding the breaching of county boundaries.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Mr. Ger Walsh,  
Meetings Administrator,  
Tipperary County Council.

Dated: 19<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

