

BOUNDARIES SCOTLAND

LOCAL INQUIRY

Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries

Held at:

Group Fitness Studio
Clydebank Leisure Centre
Queens Quay
Aurora Ave
Clydebank
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on

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SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY

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(Thursday, 7 December 2023)

AFTERNOON SESSION:

(2.00 p.m.)

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Well, good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for coming along. Can I just check you can hear me at the back without using the microphone? Thank you.

Thank you for coming along to the leisure centre this afternoon for the Boundaries Scotland Public Inquiry in relation to the local respective boundaries.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: We can't hear. Would you speak up.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: I'm sorry. Can you hear me now?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Well, I can hear you now, but I couldn't hear you before.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Hold on, I'll see if this thing -- would you like a seat further forward, would that help?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: No, I'm not deaf.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Okay. Alright. Is that better?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: That's better.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Okay.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you.

Well, good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the leisure centre here in Clydebank for the Boundaries Scotland Inquiry into the local Scottish Parliamentary boundaries. My name is Sean Murphy. I am the Sheriff Principal of North Strathclyde and, accordingly, I am, *ex officio*, Assistant Commissioner, and one of my duties is to chair these meetings.

The format of this afternoon is that, firstly, I am required to read an opening statement, which I shall do shortly. Thereafter, we have a number of people who have indicated that they would wish to speak, so I will call them up in the order in which you have registered to speak. Could I ask those who wish to say something to come to the table to my right here, so that you can be heard by everyone, hopefully, in the hall. Once those speakers have made their presentations they wish to make, I will invite any questions from the floor to the speaker for clarification on any points that they have raised, and then pass on to the next speaker. Once the various people who have registered an interest in speaking have all had the opportunity to say something, I will invite anyone else from the floor, who wishes to contribute, to say anything that they may wish to add in the light of what you have heard by that time.

The two young people to my left are recording and keeping a note of it in order to prepare a transcript of what is going on. That will be available sometime in January, along with my own report on this afternoon's meeting.

I am sorry, I am getting feedback now and I do not want to turn this into a Deep Purple concert, if you do not mind, so I'll try and hold it back.

So, when you are coming forward to speak, could I ask everyone, please, initially, to state their name and if you are appearing in your personal capacity, or if you are expressing views on behalf of an organisation or council or political grouping, could you indicate that, please, for the purposes of the record. And could I ask those who are speaking, please, just speak slowly. There were people at the previous meetings who got terribly excited and it becomes more difficult for both the transcribers and the general audience to hear. We will pass round a roving microphone for questions so that we can be heard up here from the floor. So, let me turn now to the opening statement.

This Local Inquiry is one of six being held around Scotland where you have an opportunity to make further comments or suggestions on the Commission's provisional proposals for constituencies. A transcript of today's proceedings is being made, and that will be published on the Boundaries Scotland website along with my report at a later date.

Local Inquiries are held by the Commission in areas where a local authority has objected to their proposals, where there has been a strong local response, or where they feel they want additional information. The Commission welcomes this inquiry which provides an opportunity for local views to be heard as part of the process of reviewing Scottish Parliament boundaries. The Commission also welcomes the opportunity to explain the legislative provisions and procedures it must follow.

The population and, therefore, the electorate, of each constituency is constantly changing, with people moving into or out of areas, as well as within the same area. (Audio interference) I am actually going to try without that for few minutes just to - can you hear me if I speak like this? Yes? Thank you. Okay.

The population and, therefore, the electorate, of each constituency is constantly changing, with people moving into or out of areas, as well as within the same area. As a result of these changes, some MSPs may represent considerably more or fewer electors than others. These variations in levels of representation are one of the reasons that the Commission carry out regular reviews of Scottish Parliament boundaries, in order to ensure electoral fairness.

Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act requires Boundaries Scotland to conduct reviews of Scottish Parliament boundaries for constituencies and regions at intervals of every 8 to 12 years.

The existing constituencies for the Scottish Parliament were defined following the First Review of Scottish Parliament boundaries, completed in 2010. Those boundaries have been used in the 2011, 2016 and 2021 Scottish Parliament elections.

The Second Review must be completed by 1 May 2025 when the legislation requires that the Commission submits its final recommendations to Scottish Ministers. In formulating its provisional proposals for constituencies, the Commission has a statutory duty to apply Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998 as amended. That Schedule sets out a set of rules to be applied when designing constituencies, and these rules may be summarised as follows.

There are to be 73 constituencies. Three of these are protected, so not under review. Those are the Orkney Islands, the Shetland Islands and the Na h-Eileanan an Iar (the Western isles). The remaining 70 constituencies must meet a set of requirements and must do so in a way which, so far as practicable, is consistent throughout the whole of Scotland.

Rule 1 - So far as is practicable, regard must be had to the boundaries of local authority areas.

Rule 2 - The electorate of each constituency is to be as near the electoral quota as is practicable, while having regard to Rule 1. The electoral quota is determined by dividing the total number of local government electors on the September 2022 electoral registers for all of Scotland, except the three preserved island constituencies, by 70. The electoral quota remains fixed throughout the period of a review, and is 59,902 electors for this review. Best practice from the Venice Commission (Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters) and previous reviews suggests an electorate within plus or minus 10% of the electoral quota is acceptable. The Commission may depart from Rule 1 if it thinks that it is desirable to do so to avoid an excessive disparity between the electorate of a constituency and the electoral quota, or between the electorate of a constituency and that of neighbouring constituencies.

Rule 3 - The Commission may depart from the strict application of the preceding rules if it considers that any special geographical considerations, including the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency, make a departure desirable.

Rule 4 - The Commission must take account, so far as it reasonably can, of inconveniences attendant on altering constituencies and of any local ties which would be broken by doing so.

Sometimes these rules can be seen as conflicting and the Commission must exercise its discretion in deciding the appropriate weight of each in any given constituency.

The Commission recognises that changes to constituencies are often unwelcome. However, the legislation requires that Parliamentary boundaries are regularly reviewed and places a duty to do so upon the Commission. As in previous reviews, the main concerns have generally arisen from the need to take account of the movement of electorate within Scotland.

The Commission wishes to emphasise that its review relates solely to boundaries for the Scottish Parliament and does not affect the structure or arrangements of local government areas or the services they provide. Parliamentary boundaries do not affect the provision of council services, health services, or council tax, nor do they signal a desire to change any other boundaries, including school catchments or local authority boundaries, or the remit of community councils. Electoral boundaries are purely for the purposes of identifying constituencies for elections.

The Commission also wishes to emphasise that, for the purpose of formulating proposals for revised constituencies, the results of previous elections have not entered into its consideration. Similarly, it is not for the Commission to speculate upon the effects which its recommendations may have on future voting patterns or the partisan composition of the Parliament.

The Commission developed its provisional proposals in council area groupings and decided that the combined groupings of Argyll and Bute, East Dunbartonshire, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire Council areas should be represented by 8 constituencies. There are currently 9 constituencies within these areas, although one of these includes part of the South Lanarkshire Council area.

After considering a wide range of options the Commission agreed provisional proposals which minimised the number of towns split between constituencies, took account of local ties as far as possible and ensured all eight constituencies had a variation from the electoral quota within 10%. The Commission acknowledged that the provisional proposals divided Clydebank between constituencies and that this may impact on its local ties between Whitecrook and the rest of Clydebank. However, due to improvements across the grouping as a whole, the Commission agreed the proposals for further public consultation. During the one-month public consultation, held between May and June of 2023, the Commission received over 200 responses regarding the provisional proposals for these council areas, with most comments opposing Clydebank being split between two constituencies.

This Local Inquiry has been convened as more than 100 respondents have opposed the Commission's proposals for the constituencies of Bearsden, Milngavie and Clydebank North and Dumbarton and Helensburgh that divide Clydebank between constituencies.

The Commission welcomes all comments and alternative suggestions to its provisional proposals in this area, not just on those issues raised in my statement today, noting, again, that the alternative constituency designs must meet the legislative requirements for this review, as was stated in the rules that I set out at the start.

So, having presented that opening statement, I will now invite the first speaker who registered, to come forward. That is Mr George Hawthorn of West Dunbartonshire Council. Mr Hawthorn.

RONALD McDONALD: Sorry, could I ask you a question?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes.

RONALD McDONALD: In your statement there, you said it would separate Whitecrook from the rest of Clydebank. Whitecrook would be the part of -- Whitecrook, in the centre of Clydebank, would be the bit that would be left within Clydebank.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes.

RONALD McDONALD: The areas taken out of Clydebank is a village attached to Clydebank, Old Kilpatrick, Dalmuir and Dalmuir West and a part of central Clydebank.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Can we develop that as we go along?

RONALD McDONALD: Well, it just seemed a wrong statement.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes, okay, thank you. I will note that. Yes.

MR HAWTHORN: Okay? Continue?

First of all, thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is George Hawthorn and I am the Manager of Democratic and Registration Services at West Dunbartonshire Council. I am also the Depute Returning Officer for the West Dunbartonshire County constituency.

I am here to speak on behalf of both the council and the returning officer who has responsibility for the management of the Scottish Parliamentary Elections in both the existing constituencies of Dumbarton and Clydebank and Milngavie.

West Dunbartonshire Council and the returning officer support the same view, that the status quo should be maintained. That is, both existing constituencies should be remained intact, subject to minor adjustment to the Scottish Parliamentary boundary line, which I will explain.

As a consequence of the review of the local government ward boundaries conducted in 2016 and implemented in 2017, a minor anomaly arose from the two existing Scottish Parliamentary boundaries and the new Dumbarton ward and Clydebank Waterfront ward boundary, resulting in the formation of a small polling district, namely, DU23C, which temporarily resolved the issue.

It is proposed that the new Scottish Parliamentary boundary line matches the new ward boundary line, thus removing the anomaly.

We, the council and the returning officer, are of the view that maintaining the status quo can be justified on the basis that the existing electorate figures for both constituencies - 56,120 in Dumbarton, and 55,121 in Clydebank and Milngavie - are within acceptable parameters of the new quota, and are similar to numerous other constituency electorate figures proposed by Boundaries Scotland in this review, the details of which were provided in my written response to the consultation.

However, adjusting boundary lines is not just about numbers. It is about representation. In other words, which MSP will be best placed to serve and represent a particular community, and this is why we believe that maintaining local ties is so important to this exercise.

Splitting Clydebank Waterfront ward from the rest of Clydebank does not fit well with the review criteria of maintaining local ties, and will cause confusion amongst voters. The same issue also applies to those electors residing in Lomond North ward who see their local administrator centre as being Helensburgh and not Lochgilphead, which is some considerable distance away. Evidence of this can be found in the education structure where primary schools in Lomond North feed into Hermitage Academy in Helensburgh and some young people who travel to Our Lady & St Patrick's High School in Dumbarton. A similar connection can also be found in the village of Luss, where some young people also travel to schools in West Dunbartonshire.

Maintaining the status quo will maintain these local connections in both constituencies, ensure the same representation in the parliament, and will still achieve an electorate equal to, or greater than, many of the other constituencies proposed in this review. However, before I conclude, I should also like to highlight the findings of the Assistant Commissioner in relation to the First Review of the Scottish Parliamentary Boundaries in 2010, and I quote:

“The Assistant Commissioner reach the following conclusions in his report on the Local Inquiry on West Scotland that related to Argyll and Bute and West Dunbartonshire council areas: there should be no constituency created which spans the River Clyde and has the effect of dividing the central part of the town of Clydebank from the remainder; wards 9-11 of Argyll and Bute Council should not be separated from one another and instead be kept together in a single constituency; and the existing Argyll and Bute constituency, Dumbarton constituency and Clydebank and Milngavie constituency should continue in their present forms with only a single alteration, namely that all of East Dunbartonshire ward 2 (Bearsden North) should be included in the Clydebank and Milngavie constituency.”

This statement addresses the two key points why West Dunbartonshire Council and the returning officer support the maintaining the status quo. The central part of Clydebank should not be divided from the remainder, and wards 9-11 of Argyll and Bute Council should not be separated from one another and, instead, should be kept together in a single constituency.

We ask that Boundaries Scotland reflect on these points and reaffirms the outcome of the Local Inquiry held in 2010.

Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Does anyone on the floor like to ask any clarification of Mr Hawthorn on what he has just said? Thank you.

Next, I invite Jackie Baillie, MSP for Dumbarton, to speak.

JACKIE BAILLIE MSP: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Jackie Baillie. I am the current Member of the Scottish Parliament for the constituency of Dumbarton, and I have held this seat continuously since the inception of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.

I am grateful to the Boundary Commission and to you, Sheriff Principal Murphy, for the opportunity to offer a view about proposals for changes to Dumbarton constituency.

The constituency boundary currently runs from Bowling in the south, to Ardlui in the north, and from the Rosneath Peninsula in the west to the middle of Loch Lomond in the east. Much of the area is designated as part of Scotland's first National Park, and I therefore believe that I have the most beautiful constituency, but I am, perhaps, just a little bit biased.

The constituency covers the towns of Dumbarton, the Vale of Leven and Helensburgh and Lomond, and it has largely remained unchanged since 1999 with the exception of a small area from Succoth extending up The Rest and be Thankful which was added in 2011 at the last Boundary Review.

There are three council wards covering Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven - Dumbarton, Leven and Lomond - and three council wards covering Helensburgh and Lomond, Helensburgh and Lomond South, Helensburgh Central and Lomond North. I hope to demonstrate to you that separating Lomond North from the constituency does not make geographical or practical sense.

So, let me start with a little history lesson. In more recent times, the links between Dumbarton, the Vale of Leven and Helensburgh and Lomond were demonstrated in local government arrangements. The former Strathclyde Regional Council incorporated the entire constituency within its boundaries. Dumbarton District Council, created in 1975, included the Cove and Kilcreggan Burgh, Dumbarton Burgh, Helensburgh Burgh, Helensburgh District and Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven District within its boundaries. The main urban areas then, as they are now, Dumbarton, the Vale of Leven and Helensburgh, together with the coastal villages on the Firth of Clyde, including the communities of the current Lomond North ward.

Going further back in time, the former County of Dunbartonshire also comprised Helensburgh and Lomond and, indeed, records dating back as far as the 12th century, show that the Shire of Dumbarton, similar to the Earldom of Lennox, included Helensburgh and Lomond alongside Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven. The Barony of Colquhoun also covers much of the same area.

It appears, therefore, that there has been no division between Dumbarton, the Vale of Leven, Helensburgh and Lomond dating back as far as the 12th century. Given longer, I could have probably dated it even further back, but in the present day, it is also the case that there is no division between Helensburgh and Lomond as an area within Argyll and Bute Council. The council in Argyll and Bute has distinct area committees as part of their governance structure, and the entirety of Helensburgh and Lomond is comprised of one area committee.

Let me turn now to the connections between the areas in terms of everyday living, and talk about health, education, employment and transport links.

Health services in the Lomond area are integrated with the rest of the constituency. All day cases, elective and emergency inpatient treatments, take place in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde at the Vale of Leven Hospital and into the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Paisley and other Glasgow hospitals. Primary care services are provided by Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership, with hub services critically provided in Helensburgh.

When Argyll and Clyde Health Board was abolished, the Clyde area was transferred to Greater Glasgow. At the time, a service level agreement came into force, which still stands to this day. In it, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde provide secondary care for patients living in Helensburgh and Lomond.

The community mental health team works across Dumbarton, Alexandria, Helensburgh and Lomond, with staff employed through the service covering the entire area. Inpatient mental health beds for patients from this area are based at Gartnavel Royal Hospital in Glasgow. The Helensburgh and Lomond Community Mental Health Team is based in Helensburgh, but it has links to Riverview in Dumbarton. Additionally, the GP out of hours service operates at the Vale of Leven Hospital and that serves all communities, including Helensburgh and Lomond.

Inchcruin Medical Centre, which is located within the Vale of Leven Health and Care Centre in Alexandria, caters for patients from Luss, Arrochar and Tarbet, and residents from these areas also attend at the Vale Centre for Health for specialist services, including diabetic clinics. So, those are just some of the arrangements in relation to health care. Turning to education. As we have already heard, Hermitage Academy in Helensburgh is a non-denominational secondary school which serves the communities of Helensburgh and Lomond, and feeder schools also include Arrochar Primary, Garelochhead Primary, Kilcreggan Primary, Luss Primary, Rhu Primary and Rosneath Primary. St Joseph's Primary, which provides denominational education, is based in Helensburgh and serves all three wards in the area. Pupils from St Joseph's Primary may also choose to continue denominational education, which would be undertaken at Our Lady & St Patrick's High School in Dumbarton. Many young people from the area also attend the Clydebank Campus in West College Scotland, or Anniesland College. Others attend universities in Glasgow. In terms of employment, His Majesty's Naval Base Clyde at Faslane employs around 11,000 people, both directly and indirectly. However, this is rising by a further 3,000 naval personnel and their families due to decisions taken by the MOD to relocate all submarines from across the UK at Faslane.

West Dunbartonshire Council supports the Ministry of Defence firm base initiative, as many workers employed at Faslane are resident in the communities of Balloch, Alexandria and Dumbarton. The council itself has developed strong links with the naval community due also to the large number of spouses and partners in employment with West Dunbartonshire, and the proposals given by the Boundary

Commission would split that forces' community, which is centred in Helensburgh and Lomond, but also extends to West Dunbartonshire.

The travel to work area from Lomond North and Helensburgh runs through West Dunbartonshire and eastwards to the Greater Glasgow conurbation. Many people choose to live in the more rural parts of Lomond North, understandably, because of its quiet and tranquil surroundings, but they commute to Glasgow and they face towards Glasgow.

In terms of transport, both road and public transport routes from the Lomond North area flow towards Dumbarton and then onwards to Glasgow. We are served by the A82 and the A83 and, indeed, at The Rest and be Thankful, when it is open, as part of the trunk road network and, of course, the A814. This provides links to work and social opportunities and, indeed, is helpful for those accessing health services and educational services.

Rail service routes, operated by Scotrail, originate from Helensburgh Central passing through Craigendoran, Cardross, Dalreoch, Dumbarton Central, Dumbarton East and Bowling. Alternative services run through Arrochar and Tarbet, Garelochhead, Helensburgh Upper, Dumbarton Central and then onto Glasgow Queen Street.

First Bus serves Helensburgh, the west end of Dumbarton, Central Dumbarton and Bowling, while Garelochhead Coaches operates the 302 service, linking Helensburgh to many small communities, including Luss, Arrochar and Succoth. Bus links also exist between Alexandria, Helensburgh and Luss, and Strathclyde Passenger Transport covers the legacy Strathclyde area, which incorporates Helensburgh and the communities surrounding it in the Lomond North ward. So, there is a pattern emerging here. Travel and transport between Helensburgh and Lomond is integrated and it is part of that wider Dumbarton and Vale of Leven conurbation.

Let me turn briefly to policing, and you'll forgive me if the same pattern emerges here, because officers who cover the local area are part of the Helensburgh and Lomond policing team which, in turn, is part of L Division. Members of the team recently worked in partnership with the Royal Naval and Ministry of Defence Police to crack down on youth disorder in the Helensburgh Town Centre area. They have also collaborated over many years on water safety initiatives and tackling antisocial behaviour on the rail networks which cover both Balloch and Helensburgh. In turn, they work closely with the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, which covers Luss, Tarbet and Arrochar, as well as the Balloch and Gartocharn areas. Joint initiatives have included visited disorder in Luss and Balloch, and this, again, serves to demonstrate that the police work well with partners across the entire area linking to Helensburgh and Lomond as well.

Let me turn briefly to geographically and start with Clydebank.

Clydebank has a strong identity, much like Dumbarton does. Dividing the area is likely to be strongly resisted by the local community and makes little sense when you consider the areas that people identify with. People in all areas of Clydebank and Old Kilpatrick shop, attend their GP practice, have children attending school and nursery within the Clydebank area. They do not consider themselves to be part of the Dumbarton and Helensburgh area.

Clydebank Waterfront and Clydebank Central are interlinked. They have common polling stations, and even a church, Dalmuir Barclay, which is also a community hub straddling both wards. Clydebank Town Hall is seen as the political insipid base of Clydebank and is located within the Waterfront ward, part of which you are

proposing to become part of Dumbarton and Helensburgh constituency. I think Clydebank residents would see this as losing a strong part of their identity.

The proposal suggesting dividing the Clydebank Waterfront ward itself with parts of Mountblow and Dalmuir in the proposed Dumbarton and Helensburgh constituency, and Whitecreek, which is in the same ward, would be incorporated into the Bearsden, Milngavie and Clydebank North constituency. With the greatest of respect, I think this will further damage natural community ties, and splitting wards is less than ideal.

Let me touch on Argyll and Bute. Argyll and Bute has the third sparsest population of the 32 local authorities in Scotland. They have a population of 12 people per square kilometre, compared to the average for Scotland of 70 people per hectare. That is a huge difference and gives you an idea of the sheer rurality of the area that is Argyll and Bute. It also has the second largest land mass after Highland Council and -- I did not know this until I researched this last night -- it has 37 islands with the Council boundary, 23 of which are inhabited. This makes representing people a huge geographical challenge in an area that is disparate and that large. So I would respectfully suggest to the Commission that there are special circumstances that apply to Argyll and Bute that would justify having a smaller number of electorate because of the challenging geographical spread of the constituency.

(14.31)

And, finally, my thunder has a little bit been stolen but I am always interested in learning from the past and so I naturally turn to the previous boundary review. This was of course the first period review of Scottish Parliament boundaries. It started in 2007. It finished in 2011 and the assistant commissioner at that point reached the conclusion that there should be no constituency which has the effect of dividing the central part of the town of Clydebank. The assistant commissioner further recommended that Wards 9 to 11 of Argyll and Bute Council -- namely Lomond North, Helensburgh Central and Helensburgh and Lomond South -- should not be separated from one another. I have to say I agree and the current plans do fly in the face of that wisdom.

So in conclusion I hope the Boundary Commission will appreciate that local identities matter. Clydebank is not Dumbarton and that there are special circumstances that can be considered for having a smaller electorate size in Argyll and Bute. I hope that I have demonstrated the very strong and practical ties between Lomond and Helensburgh and in turn between these areas and Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven, whether it is education, NHS provision, in our travel to work area, or indeed our transport links.

It is the enduring nature of these links that does actually stand out for me. I suspect very few areas can say that they have been joined together since the 12th century. I hope the Boundary Commission will respect that longevity and respect local ties in their deliberations. Thank you very much.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: Right, can I ask you for a copy of your text for that? Just a copy of the text for the transcript.

JACKIE BAILLIE MSP: I can do, no problem.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: Now would anyone like to raise any questions or to seek any clarity from Ms Jackie Bailey. Thank you. Now the next person who has

expressed interest in speaking is George Freeman from the Garelochhead Residents' Association. Can Mr Freeman come forward please?

GEORGE FREEMAN: Follow that, as they say. Eh? Good afternoon, George Freeman, Chairman of Garelochhead Residents' Association. I was also councillor for the Lomond North Ward, Argyll and Bute councillor for 24 years between 1999 and 2022. So I think I qualify for knowing the area of Argyll and Bute and its linkages with the Lomond North area and the Helensburgh and Lomond area fairly well. It is unfortunate that, just looking at the maps, that the area that I am clearly concentrating on is the Lomond and the Lomond North ward and Argyll and Bute, and the proposals to move it to the Argyll and Bute constituency, away from the Dumbarton and Helensburgh.

Unfortunately the maps that have been produced virtually do not show the area that we are speaking about. It has got a small patch of Rhu, Rhu Narrows and nothing else. So it would have been helpful if the whole area that we are discussing could have actually been included in the maps.

I am aware that we are covering a much larger area here today, but that is certainly not what I am looking at. I am aware that there are a number of political parties that have made representations on the proposed changes. I believe that in the main these are based on what is best for their own individual political parties and may not be what is best for the communities concerned.

I was an independent councillor. I have no links or affiliations to any political party and I am basing my arguments on what is best for the residents of the Lomond North ward and the Helensburgh and Lomond area.

I would argue that apart from being part of the same local authority, there are virtually no linkages between the Lomond North area and the rest of Argyll and Bute. All the family linkages across the Lomond North ward and the rest of the Helensburgh and Lomond area; there are virtually no family linkages between the Lomond North ward or even the Helensburgh and Lomond area with the rest of Argyll and Bute.

As far as education is concerned, young children attend primary schools in the Helensburgh and Lomond area. As far as secondary education is concerned, children from across the Lomond North ward attend secondary schools, either within Helensburgh or in Dumbarton. None travel into Argyll and Bute for education.

Virtually all those living in the Lomond North ward and Helensburgh and Lomond area either work locally or travel east to Dumbarton or Glasgow to access their work. Very few travel into Argyll and Bute.

Those living in the Lomond North area access all their services as in their local villages or travel east to Helensburgh, Dumbarton or even Glasgow to access services. Virtually no one travels west into Argyll to access any services.

Under the current system no matter who the individual MSP may be, those living in the Lomond North area and Helensburgh and Lomond area have easy access to their MSP, either via local MSP surgeries or, at worst, by travelling the short distance to Dumbarton.

Since devolution, when the Scottish Parliament was set up, the public in the Lomond North ward and the Helensburgh and Lomond area have had relatively easy access to their constituency MSP. If they were to be represented by an Argyll and Bute constituency MSP, that would be much more difficult as could be seen from the list

of Argyll and Bute MSPs since 1999, when the Scottish Parliament was first set up. Since then we have had four different MSPs in Argyll and Bute.

George Lyon, who lived on the Isle of Bute and for someone in the Lomond North area to try and travel there you are looking at -- depending on good links with ferries and timings -- a minimum of an hour and a half. We then had Jim Mather, who lived in mid Argyll; again a minimum of an hour and a half's journey. And then we had Mike Russell for two elections, who lived in Glendaruel; again you are looking at an hour and a half's journey.

Unfortunately we now have Jenny Minto, who lives on Islay and for a constituent to try and travel to Isla, again depending on ferries -- and I have travelled many times to Isla -- you are looking at approximately a four hour trip, and of course it is the same back again. So that is some of the problems that the proposed change would be.

For those living in the Lomond North ward and Helensburgh and Lomond area, travel west to Argyll and Bute is not a normal or natural travel route for services, work or education. I would therefore argue strongly that the Lomond North ward should remain with the rest of the Helensburgh and Lomond area, linked to Dumbarton and the east.

I think at that I will stop, but I am happy to answer any questions.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: Thank you, Mr Freeman. Does anyone wish to raise any point of clarification or ask any questions of Mr Freeman? Thank you. Once again, sir, if you have a spare copy of your text, for the transcribers?

GEORGE FREEMAN: I will email a copy.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: That is great. Thank you very much. Now next, can I call please upon Marie McNair, the MSP for Clydebank and Milngavie?

MARIE MCNAIR MSP: Good afternoon, everyone. As the Sheriff Principal said, my name is Marie McNair and I am the MSP for Clydebank and Milngavie. Prior to that I was a councillor for 19 years in West Dunbartonshire Council.

So, Sheriff Principal, thank you for letting us speak today at this local enquiry and as the MSP for Clydebank and Milngavie I am pleased to be able to attend today and represent my constituents at this meeting. There is really widespread opposition to the Boundaries Scotland proposals for the Clydebank and Milngavie constituency and if adopted, Clydebank's history, community and identity will be significantly eroded.

In the views of my constituents they must be heard loud and clear about this matter. Clydebank has faced many challenges, as many of those representatives say, that the town of Clydebank survived the Blitz, and other major events like the demise of heavy industry in our town.

Obviously Boundary Scotland suggests that community is a kind of important factor for consideration here. What we see in front of us is proposals that would attack the very core of our community and effectively rip it apart and transfer half our town to Dumbarton. It is really unacceptable to my constituents, and totally unacceptable to myself as the town's MSP. I was born and raised in this town and I live here. I am therefore not in the least bit surprised about the level of anger about what has been suggested here.

It is also why response after response to the consultation -- like Jackie, I was going through them last night. The opposed- these are misguided proposals for that

change. As I pointed out in my submission it is clear from the discussions that I have had with my constituents that there has been a significant lack of engagement of local communities throughout the development of these proposals.

If the proposal is advanced it would see Clydebank split in two, the majority of Clydebank Waterfront, the village of Old Kilpatrick and Dalmuir West would move to the Dumbarton and Helensburgh constituency. Meanwhile areas such as Dalmuir East, Drumry and Whitecreek -- to name a few -- would remain in the named Bearsden, Milngavie and Clydebank North constituency.

As someone who has represented the Clydebank area for many years, I am very concerned about these proposals. They are actually, I would say, quite bizarre and quite disrespectful to the history of our town. It cannot be satisfactory that half of Clydebank was removed from the constituency and bolted on to the proposed Dumbarton and Helensburgh constituency.

And also, as I said in the submission, I was actually looking at the shape of it. It creates a -- it is shape that kind of resembles a tadpole in shape and it is kind of a visual illustration that one part of our community of Clydebank has just been added on to make up the numbers in the other constituency.

With regard to the numbers issue, I note that West Dunbartonshire Council is also opposing the suggested change as laid out earlier on with George Hawthorn, and I would like to quote that the existing electorate figures for both constituencies is 56,120 for Dumbarton, 55,121 are within the acceptable parameters of the new quota and are similar to numerous other boundary electorate figures proposed by Boundaries Scotland.

Clydebank is a distinct community and it would be unacceptable to go ahead with these plans to cut it in half. It would damage long existing community relationships and harm the ongoing efforts to regenerate Clydebank, and the priority of the current regeneration work in the area is the Connecting Clydebank Project, which is focussing on enhancing the link between the town and the key regeneration site of Queens Quay. The boundary proposals would directly cut through the links the Connecting Clydebank Project are currently building. It would completely undermine all efforts currently ongoing to rebuild industries along the River Clyde and establish strong economic connections with the wider town area.

Clydebank residents have tolerated increased services being taken from our town. I feel that the kind of notion that has the boundary transferred to Dumbarton is quite insulting. But moving forward with these proposals as they currently stand has the potential to set Clydebank community back several years.

But to conclude, the concern about what is suggested can be neatly summed up by one of my constituents who said -- so obviously doing my bit of research last night I have got a wee quote so, "I want Clydebank to stay as it is. I am a proud Bankie. I want to always live in Clydebank and who on earth thought this up needs a new career change". They are saying as well, "Just leave our beautiful, historic town alone".

Thank you, Sheriff Principal. That concludes my remarks.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: Once again are there any points of clarification or questions? Yes?

FLORENCE BOYLE: Could I just comment-- we talk about splitting Clydebank in half. The local (inaudible) which is a very small community and, you know, it is negligible in the decision making. But I would argue that it would regard -- if you asked

anybody in Old Kilpatrick did they come from Clydebank, they would say no. They would not say they come from Dumbarton. But they would not say they come from Clydebank. So, you know, I am sympathetic to the argument but, you know, appropriating some of these old villages into Clydebank is not the way to win the argument.

MARIE MCNAIR MSP: I do get your points, Florence, and I think if we did a survey in Old Kilpatrick I suppose a lot of people would say they identified with Dumbarton, and I do think a lot of them do identify with Clydebank. It is obviously your own view.

FLORENCE BOYLE: Oh, yeah, no, I am not -- I am just saying that if you ask people in Duntocher where do they come from, they would say Duntocher. They would not say Clydebank.

MARIE MCNAIR MSP: Yeah, but at the end of the day we want to retain the two things.
Thank you.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: Again if a copy of your text.

MARIE MCNAIR MSP: Sure. I have kind of written on that, so I will email it if that is okay.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: Yes, that would be great. Thank you.

MARIE MCNAIR MSP: Thank you.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: Could I ask one point. You spoke about the redevelopment along the riverside. Who is driving that in terms of local government administration?

MARIE MCNAIR MSP: It is the council and the Malin Group, and the area that I am talking about is the old Carless site, which is down at Ferry Road in Old Kilpatrick.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: Thanks very much. Could I now invite Jean Cook from the Rhu and Shandon Community Council to come forward?

JEAN COOK: I am Jean Cook. The secretary of Rhu and Shandon Community Council and mine is going to be short. It may not be sweet, but it is certainly going to be short.

On behalf of the residents we object to the proposal that the current Helensburgh and Lomond area be split with Lomond North moving to Argyll and Bute constituency and Helensburgh Central and Helensburgh South staying with Dumbarton, renamed I admit.

There are four rules which the Boundary Commission must consider, and I will take each in turn. Rule 1; take account of council area boundaries. Well this is something that the Boundary Commission has chosen to disregard with respect to Helensburgh so I do not think I need to defend what I am going to say about Lomond North.

Rule 2; create areas with approximately the same number of electors. This argument is being that it will mean that each person will have equal access to their MSP. However, this will not be the case if Ward 9, Lomond North, is moved to Argyll

and Bute. If our MSP lives in Dunoon, Oban, Lochgilphead, Campbeltown, heaven forbid, or anywhere else in Argyll and Bute, they are unlikely to have regular surgeries in our area, and it would be well nigh impossible for us to visit their offices.

Currently our MSP has an office in Dumbarton and hold regular surgeries in the area in all locations which are easily accessible from Rhu and Shandon.

One could argue that the geography and the area of Argyll and Bute justifies that it be treated as a special case like Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, and I wonder why the Boundary Commission did not look at this.

Rule 3; special geographical features. There are certainly no special geographical considerations which makes this change reasonable. Increasing the area of Argyll and Bute will make it even more difficult for the MSP to represent constituents.

Helensburgh is separated from Rhu and Shandon by a field. There are geographical reasons for keeping Rhu and Shandon, and the rest of Lomond North, with Helensburgh and Dumbarton.

Rule 4; local ties and other considerations. Maintaining local ties is a consideration in agreeing boundaries. Separating Rhu and Shandon from Helensburgh will certainly not do this. Other people have spoken about the local ties to some extent and I will just say a few of them.

There is no secondary school in Rhu and Shandon and the Catholic primary school is in Helensburgh. We do our shopping in Helensburgh or even Dumbarton. There is only one shop in Rhu and Shandon and Shandon marina. Our doctors' surgeries are in Helensburgh. Lobbying for improvements in health care facilities is far more likely to be successful if carried out by somebody living in the area, rather than somebody living far away in Argyll and Bute.

All residents of Lomond North identify Helensburgh as their main town and most either work locally or in the Central Belt; certainly not in the rest of Argyll and Bute. Now it is claimed that this review only affects the electoral constituency you vote in and the MSP who will represent you. It will do far more than that if these proposes changes are adopted. It will effectively disenfranchise the residents of Rhu and Shandon and the rest of Lomond North. Thank you.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: Thank you, Ms Cook. Does anyone have any questions or points of clarification they would like to raise with Ms Cook? Thank you. Once again, if a copy of your text is available, could the transcribers have it to check the record please? Thank you.

JEAN COOK: Yes, okay.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: Thank you. Next could I call upon Polly Jones from the Helensburgh Community Council to come forward please?

FEMALE SPEAKER: I think she is this evening.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: Sorry, ah right, that is fine.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: I am sorry. I do beg your pardon. It has just been drawn to my attention she is coming to the meeting this evening. Is Greg Cook here from Scottish Labour?

GREG COOK: Yes.

PRINCIPAL SHERIFF MURPHY: Mr Cook?

GREG COOK: If I could introduce myself, my name is Greg Cook and until about four years ago I was a national official of the Labour Party working in London, and part of my remit was to deal with the party's contribution to Part 2 boundary reviews. I no longer work for the party as such but I have been retained as an adviser to the Scottish Labour Party for this review, but I do not have the privilege of living in this area. So obviously I am unable to -- I will be presenting the statement of behalf of the Party, mainly in respect of technical arguments to do with the rules and so on and an overview of the area as a whole, and we would very much rely on the evidence -- most of which has already been provided -- by witnesses this afternoon in terms of the nature of the community ties and so on, which we refer to.

So submissions made on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party, and it follows consultations which we have held with the Party's elected representatives in the area with our voluntary officials in the constituency Labour Parties and with the Parties themselves, and we would start by welcoming the provisional proposals of Boundaries Scotland for the Scottish Parliamentary Constituency as a whole. We have carefully considered those proposals. We made a written representation during the initial consultation period, which is No. 25785556, and in that we set out our overall views, made some objections to those proposals and specified those where we believe there would be a benefit to holding a public enquiry, such as this area.

In respect of the council areas and constituencies under consideration in this enquiry, we again set out our concerns in that representation. But owing to the short duration of the consultation period, we were unable to finalise a formal counter proposal. Our submission to this enquiry does set out such a formal counter proposal, which we trust will be helpful to you, sir, as Assistant Commissioner, and to Boundaries Scotland in addressing some of the concerns which have been raised and objections which have been made to the provisional proposals.

To start with the council areas as a whole, we note that the three councils of Argyll and Bute, East and West Dunbartonshire, have a combined electorate of 224,671, and when you divide that by the electoral quota of 59,902, that gives a theoretical entitlement to 3.75 constituencies.

Now separately Boundaries Scotland have changed the council groupings elsewhere in the Central Belt to place South Lanarkshire, which is currently grouped with North Lanarkshire, into a council grouping with the Scottish Borders, and that leaves North Lanarkshire without its own grouping and with a theoretical entitlement to 4.42 constituencies, which will be quite hard to squeeze down to four so almost certainly North Lanarkshire needs to be included in a grouping with other local authorities. We think it makes sense for it to be linked with East Dunbartonshire, given its record of sharing Westminster Parliamentary constituencies and the ties which we believe there are between them. And the aggregate entitlement of the four local authorities as a whole, including North Lanarkshire, would thereby be 8.17 seats and the Boundaries Scotland have accordingly allocated eight seats to it. In respect of the existing constituency, it should be noted that the existing Argyll and Bute has an electorate of 49,535, which is 10,367 -- that is 17.3 per cent

below the electoral quota and obviously exceeds the 10 per cent threshold, which it seems the Commission is using as a rough guidance to what is acceptable or not. The electorate of the existing Dumbarton at 56,120, Clydebank and Milngavie at 55,121, and Strathkelvin and Bearsden at 63,895, are all currently within 8 per cent of the quota.

Now we recognise that Boundaries Scotland may wish to reduce the disparities between the electorates of these seats and, in particular, to increase the electorate of Argyll and Bute. Furthermore, some change is necessary because of the need to include part of North Lanarkshire in the Strathkelvin and Bearsden seat, which would take its electorate to over 70,000.

We accept under the provisional proposals, the proposal to include the Kilsyth ward of North Lanarkshire in the seat which has now been named Kirkintilloch and Kilsyth, and the transfer of the Bearsden South ward to the Clydebank and Milngavie seat, which is obviously sensible in uniting the whole of the town of Bearsden in one constituency.

We note that Boundaries Scotland has also decided to transfer the Argyll and Bute ward of Lomond North to the Argyll and Bute constituency and to replace in the Dumbarton constituency with part of the West Dunbartonshire ward of Clydebank Waterfront.

The Scottish Labour Party opposes these changes, which we do not believe to be necessary. First in respect of Lomond North, we believe that the transfer of Lomond North breaks its ties with the Dumbarton constituency. We have heard a lot of detail about that already, with the town of Helensburgh in particular. Both Helensburgh and Lomond North have since 2005 been contained with the Argyll and Bute Westminster constituency and they have been part of the Scottish Parliamentary constituency of Dumbarton since its creation in 1999, having previously been part of the coterminous Westminster constituency since 1983, and between 1950 and 1983 they were both part of the Dunbartonshire West constituency, and at no point in that period since 1950 have been they located in different constituencies -- that is Lomond North and Helensburgh.

The ward includes the community of Rhu, which we heard about, which adjoins the town of Helensburgh itself. All the transportation links from Lomond North, roads, rail and buses, run to Helensburgh and on towards Dumbarton and Clydebank. Public services such as health and policing are similarly organised, with Helensburgh as the local centre for the ward. There is nothing more really we can add to what we have heard already on that.

Similarly on Clydebank, we believe the division of Clydebank with part of the Waterfront ward transferred to Dumbarton and Helensburgh, as it is now called, would be artificial and would break local ties. The two Clydebank wards share facilities and public services and do not look towards Dumbarton and Helensburgh so much for these purposes.

(15.01)

We propose that the Dumbarton constituency should remain unchanged, including Lomond North and that so should the Argyll and Bute constituency. We would argue that the low electorate of Argyll and Bute can be justified by reference to rule three of the rules for the review, as set out in the commission's guidance booklet on page 15. This states that Boundaries Scotland may depart from the strict application of rules one, which is about local authority boundaries, and two, which is about having electorates as close as is practicable to the electoral quota, if it thinks that special geographical considerations, including in particular the size,

shape and accessibility of a constituency, render it desirable to do so. Now, the wording of this rule is carried over from the legislation which until 2011 governed Westminster reviews, and indeed that wording is still contained within the current legislation, although the Boundary Commissions are now not committed to use it as a region to diverge from the five percent legal threshold which was introduced around the electoral quota for Westminster purposes. It was previously used by the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions to allow constituencies such as Western Isles, as it was then called, Orkney and Shetland, and the Isle of Wight, to have either very small or very large electorates, rather than require them to contain parts of the mainland, and also in areas where sparse populations and limited road access would otherwise create huge constituencies where travelling from one part to another was onerous. It was applied for example in North Wales, the Highlands of Scotland, where the Caithness and Sutherland seat often had fewer than 40,000 electors, and indeed in Argyll. The current Scottish Parliamentary seat of Argyll and Bute was created in 1983 for Westminster Purposes, its electorate at that time was 48,054, and the electorate of the Dumbarton constituency, which is the same as the Scottish Parliament Dumbarton constituency at the moment, at that time was 58,092, so a disparity between the two of over 10,000. I have not got access to the reports from the time of whether the Scottish Parliamentary Boundary Commission explicitly said that they were applying the special geographic circumstances rule, but that certainly appears to be the case. We believe that the geography of Argyll and Bute constituency is unique, with its numerous islands, its lochs, and the mountain ranges which inhibit travel around a constituency which anyway exceeds a hundred miles in extent from north to south. It is, we would argue, exactly the sort of circumstance which the legislation envisaged, allowing Boundaries Scotland greater discretion to vary electorates in order to ensure that constituencies do not become unwieldy. The electorate of an unchanged Argyll and Bute, at 49,535, is not we believe so low as to constitute a serious distortion or over-representation. The smallest electorate proposed by Boundaries Scotland is 54,058 in Glasgow Cardonald and Pollok; the largest divergence from the electoral quota is... there is a typo in the written statement here, that should say 9,211 which is 15.4 percent, in Inverness and Nairn, which is a large constituency, that is above the Electoral quota. And that can compare it to the disparity of about 17 percent or so in an unchanged Argyll and Bute. The benefits of doing this would be that it would allow Lomond North and the whole of Clydebank Waterfront to remain in their constituencies, minimising the breaking of ties and inconveniences, which Boundaries Scotland is required to take account of. And we set out there, the electorates of our counterproposal, which would be 49,535 in Argyll and Bute, 66,154 in the seat which we suggest should be called Bearsden Clydebank and Milngavie, and 56,129 in Dumbarton and Helensburgh. We hope the assistant commissioner and Boundaries Scotland will consider this is a reasonable balance of the rules, which will address what we believe to be the weaknesses of the provisional proposals. And as you will see, the written statement contains a couple of maps which set out what we propose. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you very much. Are there any questions or points of clarity anyone would like to raise for Mr. Cook? Yes.

Audience(M1): A point, really. You are basing your figures, and working out the seats, on people that are registered to vote. It does not always represent the population that an MSP would be looking after. So while in Clydebank and Milngavie, you want to add on the other half of Bearsden that would include a far bigger population. In a town like Clydebank there are a lot of people who do not

register to vote, so it does not give a true picture of the population. Does that mean anything to you?

GREG COOK: I am sure that is correct. Unfortunately, Boundaries Scotland is bound only to take into account the numbers of people who are registered by law, they are not allowed to --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah. Where they are taking other things into account, they need to take into account that the population that an MSP would be looking after could be larger in a town like Clydebank.

GREG COOK: Yes. Boundaries Scotland may have the discretion to take that into account if they want, I do not know, that is a matter for them.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes. Any other points anyone would like to raise? Thank you, Mr Cook. Now, we have so far heard from all the people who had intimated an intention to speak. Would anyone on the floor like to speak, or to raise any points for the attention of myself or the commission this afternoon? Please feel free to do so if you wish. Yes? Oh sorry I thought you had taken it, yes.

FLORENCE BOYLE: It strikes me that part of this is being driven by... So, there is a lot of emphasis in the arguments about linkages to local services and I totally accept that, and who the service delivery is, but some of these services, like the council... West Dunbartonshire Council is one of the smallest local authority populations in Scotland, as is Inverclyde, which I understand is causing similar discussions, so an argument based on essentially a problem that is not a problem of boundaries but of service delivery, and the service delivery is about maybe small local authorities sitting on the edge of Glasgow, and things like that. So, I know it is not... It is to do with local authorities, more importantly, and this is a diminishing population in this area, it has dropped about ten percent in ten or so years, so even if the arguments today that are being presented were accepted, are we not just postponing an inevitable scything at half in some point?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: You think this an additional perspective that ought to be taken into account?

FLORENCE BOYLE: I think so, yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes, thank you. I am sorry, could I note your name please, for the record?

FLORENCE BOYLE: Florence Boyle.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you. Thank you. Are there any... Yes, sir.

SPEAKER 1: It does strike me as absurd that all the areas to be taken into Clydebank, the area that has been proposed is Clydebank's original place.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes, yes.

SPEAKER 1: So, Clydebank was founded at the spot which they now want to remove from Clydebank.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Right.

SPEAKER 1: It is right along that whole central ward, and the town hall which is the centre of Clydebank, and all the shops which stretch along Clydebank, all the tenements of Clydebank, that whole part which is historical Clydebank, and the River Clyde. And it is the River Clyde, at the present time, which has now become the focus of redevelopment of a town which has actually been subjected to a roller-coaster of history, in terms of its ups and downs, from Clydebank Blitz through to the destruction of industry. The town that never died is about to die, if the Boundaries Commission decides to take the whole centre of the town, the heart of the town, away from it. It seems to me totally absurd.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you. You are raising a lot of personal memories, my mother was evacuated to Inverness in the wake of the Clydebank Blitz in 1940. Yes, anyway... Any other points anyone would like to raise? Well in that case I will formally conclude this part of the meeting, we will remain here until four o'clock in case any other members of the public wish to come forward. Certainly, the commission staff and myself will, but everyone else now please feel free to leave if you wish to do so, thank you very much both for your presence and your valuable contributions this afternoon. Thank you.
(end of afternoon session)
(15.10)

EVENING SESSION:

(18.00)

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Well, it is about six o'clock, so I will formally convene the meeting this evening. Ms Jones, my name is Sean Murphy, I am the Sheriff Principal for North Strathclyde so I am responsible for conducting this evening's proceedings. We would normally begin by reading over the statement but we have given you a copy to look at yourself, and I understand that you represent the Helensburgh Community Council, is that right?

POLLY JONES: That is right, yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: And you have prepared some slides, but we have got paper copies. Would to take us through those?

POLLY JONES: Do you want me to... where would you like me to sit?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Would you mind sitting over there, because the...

POLLY JONES: The recording.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: There is a little gadget on the table that will actually pick you up for the transcription team. Thank you.

POLLY JONES: So, thanks very much for the opportunity to come and share the views from the Helensburgh Community Council. It is important to start by saying we really recognise the value of you reviewing the boundaries, and that helps keep our Scottish democracy alive, and we are sorry that we had not put in a written submission in the early, previous timetable. However, what I really wanted to share

with you is direct experience of what it is like living in these communities, and why the proposed boundary feels like it is dividing a community in a way that does not fit with how our lives operate in the area, particularly focusing on one of the priorities that I know was important for Boundaries Scotland, which was thinking about the maintenance of local ties. So, if you turn to the second page of your printout I have got a couple of copies of the maps -- of your new constituency areas, the proposed Argyll and Bute constituency on the left, and the proposed Dumbarton and Helensburgh on the right. And what I want to talk about is the area that is circled red in both -- this boundary between the two.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes, thank you.

POLLY JONES: And if you turn onto the next page, the third page, I just want to spend a few minutes, I will not take very long, talking about the links between Helensburgh and Rhu, Shandon and Garelochhead, and the area known locally as the peninsula, the bit sticking out with Kilcreggan and Cove on it. And your boundary line, as you can see on my very rough, not so beautiful map on the slide, separates out the town of Helensburgh from these other local areas, and this feels really strange for our area, as I know you have heard already this afternoon, because so many of the services and activities across our area bring people from part of what would be separated by this boundary into the town of Helensburgh. Starting with employment, the biggest employer in the whole of the West of Scotland is the naval base at Faslane, which if these proposals came to pass would be now separated by a boundary from the areas where most people are living and coming to work. Most of the employees, unless they live on the site, come from Helensburgh, Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven, so would be over the boundary. There are five primary schools in the area that would be outside of the proposed boundary but feed into two secondary schools, mainly Helensburgh Hermitage Academy but also Lomond School, which are both located in Helensburgh, and that feels, that sort of... you can see it on the arrow, the movement is all from that area into Helensburgh. The public transport links are set up in exactly the same way: buses take you into Helensburgh, that is where the train routes are, too. Many people obviously going into Glasgow and other areas to work, but that is how the transport structures are set up. The health services locally similarly follow this pattern, pulling people into Helensburgh. So the one GP practice in those areas, Rhu, Shandon and Garelochhead and the peninsula, that is located in Garelochhead, is actually run by a GP practice in Helensburgh. And the agreement with wider NHS services, although we are all of us in NHS Highland, the agreement is that NHS Greater Clyde and Glasgow provides most of those services, so again driving us back into Helensburgh and other areas. The library service for this whole community is located in Helensburgh, as is our fantastic new leisure centre, only opened a year ago, lots of investment from Argyll and Bute Council, at the last count 5,000 members drawn from right across this area that would be across the boundary line. Our postal services, there are daily postal services available in Helensburgh, one post office open there every day, there is a service in Arrochar that opens a couple of days, but just announced this week is the anticipated closure of the only other postal service, in Garelochhead, because people are retiring and --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: I am sorry, where was the other one you mentioned?

POLLY JONES: Arrochar

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Oh Arrochar, yes. Thank you.

POLLY JONES: So there is two days of postal service in Arrochar.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes.

POLLY JONES: But with Garelochhead Post Office expected to close in the near future, again all the postal services are back in Helensburgh. Helensburgh is the hub for local shops and hospitality services, not just where people spend their money and time but also where they are employed. And interestingly the postcode for this whole area, and the phone code, is the same for the area. It feels like, as I say on the next slide, a real natural constituency. There is a common identity across these area that the proposed boundary would divide. And I mean, you will know much better than me some of the history of this area, having moved between different council areas and been the responsibility of different places, the one thing that people are consistent about is that it feels like it is one community, and so putting a boundary between Helensburgh and Rhu, Shandon and Garelochhead and the peninsula just feels wrong. And I think this matters because when we think about how constituents engage with their elected representatives, you want it to be really simple to address any concerns. But if you have people living in an area, working in an area, raising concerns about any of the services that I have listed before, but that is in an area belonging to another MSP, it makes things really complicated. Complicated for an individual, 'Who do I speak to? Which MSP do I speak to, do I speak to mine or do I speak to one where that business or service is located?', or those MSPs have to work much more closely together to resolve an issue. They might not agree, they might not have first-hand experience of what it is like using those services, in terms of how they feel in that community. Secondly, in effect, because of how easy it is to connect with your MSP we are always struggling for people to understand our new, and it still feels quite new, system for the Scottish Parliament: the fact that you have somebody elected for your geographic area and then somebody for your region. People are already confused about that, they are deeply confused about what the responsibilities are for an MP, an MSP, as well as your local councillors. But I think putting a boundary in a space that divides an area in a way that just does not feel right, does not reflect how we live our lives and our community, makes it even harder because people will continue to be confused about who they are meant to be speaking to about what. And thirdly, as I have mentioned a little bit already, I think it matters because it affects how that MSP and their team understand your experience. If you are, with this proposed boundary, communicating with an MSP who does not experience these services because they are not living in a community where it is divided, it is much harder for them and their to understand what it is that you are talking about, to have the connections with a service that is in another constituency that is managed in a different way. Why would they have any contact or understanding of that, because that is not an area that they live in even though their constituents live in their area. So for all of these reasons the community council are really keen that the local ties are maintained, to keep Helensburgh with Rhu, Shandon, Garelochhead and the peninsula. That is the geographical area, the economic and social unit, that we identify with, that we operate in, and this proposed boundary would cut right through that.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you.

POLLY JONES: I do not know whether you ask questions or clarifications, but I am very happy if you do.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Is there anything you would like to ask while you are here this afternoon? I heard arguments along these lines from others.

RONALD McDONALD: No, I think you put a very good case for them, so you think communities... well, you think the Helensburgh Peninsula, do you think you would rather it moved in block to Argyll or stayed with Dumbarton?

POLLY JONES: Well I think that may be a bigger question for the Boundaries Commission, because we have not discussed that specific point at the community council. I think the point for us is that splitting them is problematic; it needs to be kept together. And I know that the rationale for the commission overall was to look at the size of the electorate, and that sounds entirely sensible and logical overall, but digging down into what that would mean for this community it would create a number of problems and does not reflect the way that we work.

RONALD McDONALD: So you think communities should be the prime thing not the numbers?

POLLY JONES: Well I think that the legislation makes it clear that we aim for a balanced number of the electorate in each constituency but we recognise that, particularly with our wonderful wiggly, watery geography of Argyll and Bute, that there are times when where communities settle, and how they live and work, does not fit the beautiful regular pattern of electorate sizes.

RONALD McDONALD: I think it might be the reverse, that the community is lot more important, and we should have tried to get the numbers, should be secondary, and the community should be the primary.

POLLY JONES: Well I think it's a balance, and for the number of people you are separating out by putting a boundary line between Helensburgh and the peninsula, Garelochhead, Rhu and Shandon, that is not a large number of people, but the important bit feels like to keep that together with Helensburgh.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you. Nothing you would like to clarify? No, okay. Can I give you an enormous thanks for your contribution, the community council is one of the smaller groups, obviously, that have spoken to us, compared to elected councils and so on, but you produced some beautiful materials that are really thoughtful and well presented, so thank you very much indeed. A lot of effort has gone into this presentation on behalf of the community council, and we thank you for that.

POLLY JONES: You are welcome. It is great cycling, I should note, too, around our patch.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: I have actually gone right round the peninsula.

POLLY JONES: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: And when I was up at Arrochar it was like December, and I actually was sunbathing by the time I got back to Rhu. That was a good twenty years ago, but I have never forgotten that, yes.

POLLY JONES: Well that is why when I get a couple of hours' break that is where I go, round that loop.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: It is beautiful, thank you very much indeed, thank you for...

POLLY JONES: No, you are welcome.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: There is no one else that has indicated they want to speak, is there anything you would like to add from what you have heard today?

RONALD McDONALD: Not really, no.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Okay.

RONALD McDONALD: I just... I was at the last one --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes.

RONALD McDONALD: I came as well, and sorry, I just do not understand what they were trying to do in that one, and I do not understand --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes, yes.

RONALD McDONALD: -- what they are trying to do in this. I know you are trying to get the numbers together, but I would certainly agree that rural --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes.

RONALD McDONALD: -- rural areas should be allowed much smaller -- numbers and the whole thing -- because they have got further to travel. Making a town area like Clydebank or near Glasgow area that is the same numbers as say somewhere like Inverness is silly, or somewhere like Caithness and Sutherland where you are obviously travelling miles just to see people. And you cannot come along the same way, that will not work there. But also, I did bring it up earlier, the MSPs or MPs, maybe they are going to look up their numbers of people, and numbers of voters total is recognised that in certain areas, areas like Clydebank or Glasgow will have a far lower percentage registered to vote than -- somewhere like Bearden or Milngavie have. And so really you are leaving MSPs with a harder job to do. Mind you, places like Bearden or Milngavie tend to complain more. So there may be a balance-- there might be a balance there. No, it is just that -- I think communities are far more important, trying to keep the community together is far more important than numbers. I have known a time in Clydebank where there were a couple of very large wards and a couple of small wards, and instead of sorting the whole thing out they just divided the two large ones. And the people in one of the large ones, which is an area called Faifley, and estate in Clydebank, the people of Faifley said 'We preferred it with the one councillor, then we knew who our councillor was. And the fact there were two representatives did not seem to impress the people. So, I think that you should sometimes want to see what the people want, and go...

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: The internal community bonds are more important than the --

RONALD McDONALD: I think so.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: -- than making things fit into theoretical boxes.

RONALD McDONALD: Yes, aye. Prefer moving a community together than --'Oh, you do not see me, you are in the other half so you see the other person'. They preferred it to be in the community. So...

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes, thank you. We do not know if anyone else is going to come, so myself and the --

RONALD McDONALD: I thought there was somebody else.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Sorry?

RONALD McDONALD: I thought there was somebody else.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Ourselves and the team will obviously wait until 8, but there is no reason for you to stay if you do not want. You are welcome to stay of course if you want to, but there is no requirement, please feel free to leave at any time you want. Thank you both for your contributions this evening.

POLLY JONES: Okay, well I will leave you to it, thanks for the time.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you very much.

(18.15pm)
(The Evening Session Adjourned at
20.00)