

BOUNDARIES SCOTLAND

LOCAL INQUIRY

2nd Review of Scottish Parliament Constituency Boundaries

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SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS

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AFTERNOON SESSION:

(1407)

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Well, good afternoon, everyone. We will just start at this point. My name, first of all, is Nigel Ross, I am the Sheriff Principal for Lothian and Borders. I am here for the purposes of taking evidence from members of the public and others who wish to comment on proposed changes to boundaries for elections to the Scottish Parliament. I am not part of the Boundaries Scotland -the Commission - and I have accepted appointment only on a temporary basis to advise and assist Boundaries Scotland. My assistance is limited to conducting local inquiries for the review of the Scottish Parliament constituencies. My function here is not to represent anybody, but simply as a neutral party who will take evidence and comments and prepare a report which summarises the points raised. That report will be submitted to Boundaries Scotland and will be made publicly available at the end.

For today's purposes I will take a few minutes to explain the purpose of this inquiry, the purpose of the review and how Boundaries Scotland has gone about the whole exercise.

So, 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 Scottish parliamentary 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. As a result of these changes, some MSPs may represent considerably more or fewer electors than others. These variations in levels of representations 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, this review, must be completed by 1 May 2025 when the legislation requires that the Commission submit 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.

The rules can be summarised as follows:

There are to be 73 constituencies. Three of these are protected so not under review, and these are Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and Na h-Eileanan an Iar (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 states 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. So, the electoral quota remains fixed through the period of a review, and at the moment is 59,902 electors for this review. Best practice from the Venice Commission, which is the 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 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 the 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, such as 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 grouping of City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian council areas should be represented by 12 constituencies. There are currently 11 constituencies within these areas although one constituency also contains part of Scottish Borders council area which is not in this proposed grouping.

The Commission noted the challenge in designing constituencies for this grouping in respecting local government areas, while offering improved variation from the electoral quota, and taking account of local ties. Half of the existing constituencies in this grouping have a variation from the electoral quota in excess of 10%.

The Commission proposed 12 new constituencies for this grouping, all within 10% variation from the electoral quota. Due to the growth in the number of electors in Edinburgh it was no longer possible to have six constituencies wholly within the Edinburgh council area boundary.

During the one-month public consultation period held between May and June 2023 the Commission received nearly 200 responses regarding the provisional proposals in the Edinburgh area, with most comments relating to the proposed Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow constituency. The respondents opposed this constituency due to a lack of ties between Muirhouse or Pilton and West Lothian.

Therefore, the Commission agreed to hold a local inquiry in respect of the proposed Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow constituency due to the large number of responses relating to that constituency and that is the focus of this local inquiry today. The Commission has already held an inquiry into the proposals for Midlothian North and Musselburgh and East Lothian and is holding this one into Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow. At this stage it is not holding any further inquiries regarding constituencies in the City of Edinburgh Council area although it expects it may do later in the review.

The Commission welcomes all comments and alternative suggestions to its provisional proposals, not just on those issues raised in my statement today, noting again that the alternative constituency designs must meet the legislative requirements for the review.

At the end of the local inquiry, I will draft a report for the Commission with my comments and recommendations from today's proceedings. As I said earlier a transcript of today's inquiry will also be published on the Commission's website. The Commission will then consider the report with all of the responses to the public consultation on its provisional proposals for constituencies as it develops revised proposals for constituencies. The Commission will consult with those boundaries in Spring 2024 and may need to hold a further local inquiry on those boundaries if required.

So that hopefully explains why we are here and what it is desired to achieve and against that background I would invite our first speaker. If I can ask maybe if the speakers to come out and sit at the table, there.

I know there is a number of you want to speak today and so I will just select the first name I have on the list. Do we have John Halliday please? Mr Halliday, good afternoon. If you just want to come out and maybe sit at the table, there and --

MR HALLIDAY: Right, sure.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: -- you can say what you wish. So, just to confirm, your name is John Halliday?

MR HALLIDAY: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: And you represent the Community Renewal Trust?

MR HALLIDAY: That is right, yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Okay. Do you have a written submission or is it just an oral submission?

MR HALLIDAY: I was intending to do an oral submission. I have contributed to the first round of consultation.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: That is fine. The only reason I raise it is that if anyone has a written submission to make it would be helpful if I could get a copy of it at some point in order to incorporate it into the report, but with that, off you go.

MR HALLIDAY: Thanks, I am conscious of trying to avoid too many duplicated things. I have written in a statement before, but I was interested in hearing other people's views as well. So, I have lived in the area for 14 years in North Edinburgh. I represent Community Renewal Trust. We are a community-based organisation based exactly on Pennywell Road, which is the dividing point, just here between Muirhouse and Pennywell. So, I spend a lot of time dealing with people from both sides of that road. Ironically, if you speak to people locally they would say that there was some sort of sense of difference between the two sides of Pennywell Road, but actually, if anything it is because they claim united in the needs they have and for decades have felt like a very cohesive community in the sense of being a part of Geater Pilton, which is important because this isn't just an area where people live actually quite difficult lives, often in deprivation, but people are very proud of their local identity. And part of that has always been around social activism and community activism. Actually, I was delighted to hear there was a review taking place and unfortunately, this is the worst possible outcome in many ways because I actually thought this was an opportunity to rectify a longstanding issue of Muirhouse and Pennywell having been divided, into what was - I am sorry, I'm saying it wrong - Pilton and Muirhouse being divided along Pennywell Road into two constituencies. I don't think we should have a sob story about our own organisation and our ability to make change happen, but an example is just how often we need to deal with two sets of elected officials on either side of the road, which while we have excellent relationships with both and it's irrespective of party, it doubles the amount of work. We also collaborate - just to give a sense of how much goes on and how much community activism there is from community lead activism in that local area, in that area of Muirhouse and Pilton there are 40 other organisations who are all voluntary sector organisations as part of a network that we try to coordinate. We have to hold meetings. A big part of that is about getting councillors, Westminster and Holyrood officials all round a table together and trying

to make change happen on behalf of the local area. This kind of boundary crossing, across a traditional area, is just one of the things that interrupts real change happening in that area where momentum can easily be lost.

The existing boundaries already were a problem and I intended to raise this, and I noticed last year during the previous consultation on the other parliaments boundaries, I made a similar comment on behalf of local residents and actually there was ability in that case to make it that Muirhouse and Pilton could come together in the same constituency. So, again, I thought this was a real opportunity. This feels like the worst possible outcome in the sense that the needs and the connection between places like Linlithgow and Muirhouse are so utterly different. I can't think of a place - while Muirhouse isn't a city centre as such, it has the sense of being a city centre deprived urban area and deserves to be treated as such in how it relates to its local area. In my experience of living in the area and working in the area - I am sure others might not agree - but there's a lot less connection and local connection between the communities of Silverknowes and Muirhouse, not that there's not people crossing that. It's not as if people don't sort of work on both sides, but like any two neighbouring neighbourhoods, they just neighbour each other in my experience there.

So, there is a clear place where the line could more clearly be drawn to the west of Muirhouse. I accept the difficulty here. It feels like this has been a huge challenge for the commissioners to deal with Edinburgh and the many changes to it. So, I accept that it is very, very difficult, but it feels like a community is being really badly affected by this change, and particularly one where the sort of needs it might have and the representations it might need to be made are just so different, and will not get the right kind of representation that's required from someone whose attention is more on the majority area of the constituency, which is more rural and based in small towns. The town occupancy rate I think is a good example of how that works and how places like Cramond, again, are much more connected and other parts of the west of Edinburgh are much better connected into the West Lothian area than Muirhouse is.

And I am left with one question, which I am posing, but I'm not seeking an answer as such, which is: it feels like within the rules there was an additional bit that ties the Commissioner's hands a little bit around starting with a requirement at a regional level. I might have misunderstood the rules. You must have spent absolutely ages trying to understand them, but by starting with needing to say West Lothian - the Lothians and Edinburgh will be considered as a sort of area within which the boundaries will be decided. It feels like a restriction that's then kind of come back to bite, and this feels like the area that's probably worst affected in my mind. That's all the points I wanted to raise.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Right, thank you. Would anybody like to raise any points with Mr Halliday? No? Well, thank you very much.

MR HALLIDAY: Thanks for letting me go first everyone, as well.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you for that. The next name I have on my list is councillor Euan Hyslop. If you just want to come and take your seat.

CLLR HYSLOP: Thanks very much.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: So, you are councillor, Euan Hyslop?

CLLR HYSLOP: Yes, from a neighbouring ward that borders the constituency or the proposed constituency of Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Just to check that that is Drum Brae and Gyle?

CLLR HYSLOP: Correct.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Okay, thank you.

CLLR HYSLOP: Yes, correct. I haven't prepared anything to speak about or to say. So, I'll kind of just speak from what are I suppose my initial thoughts around when the proposal came forward and discussion with colleagues. I think that very much the proposed constituency is very much victim to what feels like Almond ward, which is at times all a bit too large to meet its purposes. It is obviously a multi-member ward. It's a four member ward and it's a very diverse ward stretching all the way from Queensferry through to Muirhouse and taking in all of rural west Edinburgh, in between Cramond and parts of north Edinburgh. Muirhouse is very much as John alluded to a part of North Edinburgh and is distinct in that sense from a lot of the rest of Almond ward. And so, from my initial perspective, initial thoughts from when the boundary proposals came forward was the Queensferry, Kirkliston, out of town, Edinburgh – not an issue. And if you ask anybody from out that way, Queensferry folk – I've got many friends from out there – they very much consider themselves still to be part of West Lothian and obviously the original Linlithgowshire. West Lothian boundaries can take all the way to the Almond River. And so, when you suggest to them even now, certain folk that grew up in Queensferry that they're Edinburgh, it makes them roll their eyes slightly, not in a bad way, but I actually saw an article about the "Loony Dook" on New Year's Day, saying, "Edinburgh residents Loony Dook on New Years day", I thought if my Queensferry friends saw that, "Edinburgh" they would have something to say about it.

Yeah, so, I think very much there is an issue around when you then add on the consideration that you're adding significant portions of western parts of what is the Linlithgow constituency at the minute onto the new proposed constituency, it adds an extra – as the previous speaker, John, alluded to – an extra element of almost, you know, disconnect between these communities. So, very much the needs of the people of Linlithgow are different, I imagine, from those in this part of North Eden Mill[?], Muirhouse, but also the connection between the two seems, in terms of public transport, in terms of connectivity – I know colleagues who have travelled today from West Lothian and we're not too far away from Muirhouse now. It took over an hour to get here in the car and if you were to try and get here by public transport it would be significantly difficult. Most people would have to get at least two buses, if not a bus, a train, a bus. So, there's that issue there of how well the political entity that's been proposed represents – is able to represent – those two very different constituencies. So, the proposal that was put forward by Linlithgow Constituency Association my friend and colleague is here to speak about that proposal in more detail, I think later today. It very much is the position that probably we take, which is that for me the best boundary you could take would be the Almond River and I know that that's not what was in the proposal because the numbers and the restrictions that the numbers provide around trying to meet that 10 per cent over the 59,000, if you were to take out all of Cramond and there was a

lot of written responses in the first round of consultation from residents in Cramond and the wider Cramond area who were fairly unhappy with the proposal because they very much see themselves as part of Edinburgh, West Edinburgh, but certainly not rural West Edinburgh.

So, I feel that that is one of the challenges I would say, so, within my ward, the Parkgrove area and Clermiston Parkgrove – they share a catchment for Royal High School with that part of Cramond and that, because of the boundary of the school catchment area, very much feels like a unified or certainly a sense of community across that part of West/Northwest Edinburgh. And that school catchment stops at the River Almond, where the original Linlithgowshire boundary is. So, while I think Muirhouse definitely shouldn't be considered - or there should be certain considerations given to Muirhouse in that part of North Edinburgh, which is very much considering themselves as North Edinburgh, there's also the Cramond, Barnton area, which very much consider themselves as West Edinburgh and would be more suited to being part of the Edinburgh Western constituency if that's possible to take that into consideration. I am sure I have missed a few things but, I will stop there.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: All right, thank you. Does anyone have any questions for Councillor Hyslop?

(14.30)

MURRAY TOSH (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): Yes. Could I just ask out of interest, you are obviously pretty clued up about the numbers in the boundaries, and so on, in the area. How many people do you think you would be moving if you unified the Pilton/Muirhouse area? And given that you know that there is a 10 per cent variation rule, if you reduced the Forth constituency by that amount, how could you bring it back within reach of this average figure that has to be achieved?

COUNCILLOR EUAN HYSLOP: Yes, it is a good question. I think colleagues, potentially Alistair, is probably better placed to answer that question around the specific number. So when I liaised with the Linlithgow Constituency Association around their submission, a written submission, I pretty much said what I have just said and in follow-up conversations I have not since then, which was like a few months ago now, looked at the exact numbers, the population. I am sure there's somebody, people in the room, that will be able to give a better answer than me around exact population displacement if you were to take these different parts of the proposed constituency out and into either Edinburgh Northern and Leith or Edinburgh Western. So unfortunately, I can't answer that.

But it was certainly they were of the view that no matter how you moved it, you were only really able to, within the limitations of that 10 per cent rule, take out a part of North and West Edinburgh that is currently in the constituency. So that being Muirhouse, potentially Muirhouse and Silverknowes, but definitely not the whole of the north-west. But as for the specific, the actual statistics, the numbers, and the population there, I don't have that to hand, I'm sorry.

MURRAY TOSH: So, could I ask a supplementary?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Yes.

MURRAY TOSH: Did I detect a sort of hierarchy in your answer then, that there is a sort of priority for the Pilton/Muirhouse application as your main concern?

COUNCILLOR EUAN HYSLOP: No, I don't think so. I think it's just that in terms of, um, yes, I suppose that they both fall into the category of possibly being poorly represented within this constituency, feeling like, as you saw with the written submissions, that the residents feel like that constituency maybe does not represent them, but they are not, you know, part of West Lothian and Linlithgow. But certainly, for Muirhouse, as the previous speaker alluded to, very much part of North Edinburgh, and even within its current guise I know that the Westminster boundaries have changed and it is now part of Edinburgh North and Leith, but within the current Scottish Parliamentary boundaries and as is proposed, obviously, it is supposed to continue on as Edinburgh Western. But that has always been a bit of, again as the previous speaker alluded to, an interesting kind of categorisation because if you spend any time in and around North Edinburgh, you know North Edinburgh Arts is in the middle of that community. You know, it's very much a part of North Edinburgh and integrated as such with the rest of Granton and Pilton and whatnot.

So I feel, from my own experience living in Edinburgh and having worked in and around North Edinburgh, that while they both, Muirhouse area that is in this proposed constituency and the Cramond / Barnton area, both would be better situated potentially in terms of representation within Edinburgh North and Leith and one with Muirhouse and Edinburgh Western. It is unlikely that because of the numbers, and maybe some official people will be able to say exactly, it is almost impossible to remove them both because of the limitations that are put on us by the numbers. So therefore, the furthest away from the centre of what is this new constituency is Linlithgow and ... sorry, is Muirhouse and so the argument is probably that there is a stronger argument to have that incorporated ... removed from the proposal and incorporated into Edinburgh Northern and Leith. That, yes, you have tested me with the numbers and unfortunately, I don't have those to hand.

MURRAY TOSH: I think you got the answer there.

CALLUM BRUNTON (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): Can I ask a question on the same lines? You are saying there is a sort of sense of hierarchy of where's most affected. Would you agree with my characterisation that there are bits of even Edinburgh, sorry, whatever the new Edinburgh North and Leith I suppose, sorry, I have used the wrong words here, but actually the connection to Edinburgh West actually might be that the community would be less affected by being part of Edinburgh West in terms of Around here, for instance, just literally where we are sat is actually on the junction of a few constituencies, but actually people living here, they certainly can get into town but have a relatively strong connection to Edinburgh West in general. Does that kind of build on that sense of hierarchy that you are giving in the sense that there is a dramatic effect on these people's lives by being part of Edinburgh West and then freeing up some capacity in the Edinburgh North to them? Expand out might be a kind of trade off worth having.

COUNCILLOR EUAN HYSLOP: I definitely think so, yes. I think that you're probably right. I think at some point along that northern boundary between Muirhouse and Silverknowes, um, that residents in that part of kind of west/north-west, they would potentially, even though they are very much on the northern fringes of the city, would potentially consider themselves also as part of West Edinburgh. And I think

that ties into the catchment of the schools and other ways that they integrate with the community. So, yes, Cramond Primary, for example, is a feeder for Royal High School, which ties into parts of Clermiston and whatnot. So, it's the way that they could integrate with the community or engage with the community, you know, has multiple layers and it is not just through the political boundaries of the constituency in fact. You know, that's probably the least of such, but the community council boundaries, their ward councillors, and I would say even more so the school catchment areas.

So yes, at some point that will change from feeling more like North Edinburgh to parts of West Edinburgh. But it's difficult to draw a line and I recognise the challenge that the Boundaries Scotland have had with doing that and it is obvious that, you know, the easiest solution, because I suppose the primacy of the ward boundaries and how important they are within the whole consideration of this, the ward boundaries. But as I alluded to in the earlier statement, the start of my statement, at times it feels like that four member ward sometimes is so vast, um, hence the likes of four member ward and at times, you know, it's a challenge I suppose politically for the ward councillors that represent that, how they make sure that every part of that constituency, which is very different parts, is represented.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: All right, thank you very much, councillor. Next on my list I have Alistair Tatton, you are the SNP --

ALLISTAIR TATTON: Linlithgow Constituency Association.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Linlithgow Constituency Association, right.

ALLISTAIR TATTON: Yes, okay.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: All right, just in your own time.

ALLISTAIR TATTON: If I may, I just wanted to kind of, I suppose, re-emphasise the initial submission that we had made and part of that there were some proposals within there, as Euan has already touched on. Obviously, we recognise that there are challenges as to how you actually get the numbers to kind of fit within. So I'm pretty certain that I think Linlithgow currently has the largest electorate in the Scottish Parliament, so I recognise that there is obviously a need to change. Of course, it is probably one of the greatest affected in terms of the proposals because essentially the constituency as it is just now would be split in two. So West Lothian would effectively have, I suppose, two and a half instead of two constituencies that it has just now. So ... sorry, I have just ... I will back up.

So, as I said, yes, the Linlithgow constituency is currently the largest constituency in the Scottish Parliament in terms of electorate. However, it does currently benefit from several of the current review rules where, you know, it is within one council area. It is geographically consistent in terms of travel and transport, as Euan kind of touched on as well. You know, that is potentially one of the challenges of the proposed constituency where, although the numbers are less in terms of electors, it is actually now a longer constituency than the current Linlithgow constituency. You know, there are considerable local connections between the five ward areas, but we do recognise obviously that the change required is ... or that there is a change required obviously, as I said, because of the number of electors. However, it feels slightly as though numbers have been prized over local connections.

So, the initial proposals, sorry, the current Linlithgow constituency has essentially been split into two with two council areas joining a large Linlithgow council area, which I think is EH1, with the other two new constituencies falling within West Lothian. As I said, it does appear as though elector numbers have been prized over things such as geography. So, the constituency, as I said, extends beyond both, so community connection and history.

So, I suppose one of the things that we tried to put forward, as I said, was a proposal as to how could we better reflect actually the connections within the limitations of the changes that could be made. So, one of the things that you touched on was around numbers. So as part of our suggestion we suggested bringing in to the new Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow seat a proposed electorate of about, I think it was, 55,800, an additional 5,700 electors but losing approximately 7,708. The proposal would essentially see the bringing in of the Ratho area, which I think was about 2,600, from the proposed Edinburgh Pentlands. Also bringing in areas of the West Lothian 09 ward area, which would be in the Almond Valley area to Torphichen/Westfield and also an area around Blackridge. This would add a total of around about 5,700 and look to transfer the kind of Muirhouse West and Muirhouse East areas, possibly also then Davidson Mains and Silverknowes to the proposed Edinburgh Western, which would see the transfer out of approximately 7,700.

As part of the submission, we also looked at the impact that that might have on other constituencies. So by making those changes it would see Edinburgh North and Leith with the proposed electorate of 59,650, adding Muirhouse West and Muirhouse East, which would take that electorate to 63,600. Edinburgh Western with the proposed electorate of 59,800, adding Davidson Mains and Silverknowes, with the current Edinburgh Western seat, which was touched on, these communities may identify more closely with. It would take them, that electorate, to 63,600. Edinburgh Pentlands with the proposed electorate of 55,500, would lose Ratho, which is approximately 2,600, and take it down to 52,900, but by restoring the Dreghorn and Oxfangs area, um, which in Edinburgh Southern I think is about 60,000, would then have Edinburgh Pentlands reach about 55,000 as well. Then a new constituency in West Lothian of Bathgate and Almond Valley with a proposed electorate of 61,500, which would then lose the villages of Torphichen, Westfield and Blackridge, would be taken down to 58,400, which would leave the new Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow constituency, I think it is approximately 53,900, which was just out of the proposed 55,000 range. However, my understanding is that there is significant development ongoing within the constituency already in Winchburgh and also, and Euan might be able to help me on this one, a lot of development in this area and Edinburgh as well.

So one of the other proposals that we suggested was actually potentially having Bo'ness, which has strong connections with Linlithgow, and actually I believe even has an EH post code as well. However, I understand that that would require regional review seeing this currently it falls without. Any questions?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Sorry, just looking for, I think I saw a written submission.

ALLISTAIR TATTON: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Is that really what you are referring to with these numbers?

ALLISTAIR TATTON: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Just obviously there are a lot of numbers there. I just wanted to make sure they had not changed between --

ALLISTAIR TATTON: No, no. I suppose one of the concerns as well is the numbers should not have changed from that submission. So, I would refer obviously to that for more accurate details. I suppose a main concern would be, as I said, if there is current ongoing development that, you know, one of the reasons for the change with the Linlithgow constituency being so large is that by the time that these changes come in, are we effectively already starting to push toward those numbers again as well.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: All right. First of all, thank you for the work that you have clearly put in on that. It will be very interesting to see those numbers. Secondly, the Commission is bound to consider numbers as at September 2022, therefore future development is not part of their considerations. But it is a valid point that will evolve.

ALLISTAIR TATTON: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: All right, any questions? Yes.

COUNCILLOR EUAN HYSLOP: It is a very valid, a very good point, and I was going to ask at some point, you know, to what extent we can take into consideration future developments because I think in the case, in the instance of the development in West Edinburgh that Allistair alluded to, and I meant to mention in my ten minutes or so was that there is a proposed new set of plans which essentially has a new town being built in this new constituency being the size of Kirkcaldy. You know, it is massive, it is 10,000 houses plus, and that is not taking into account all the stuff from Winchburgh etc. So yes, I suppose it is a comment to add into the fact that you mentioned there, Allistair, but the answer has already been given that that cannot be taken into account. But I suppose with that house building considered, then we push the numbers in the new constituency, even under the proposal which you put forward and the Linlithgow Constituency Association put forward, above the threshold. Is that right?

ALLISTAIR TATTON: Yes, so I think there are two reasons for mentioning that. One that is a part of it is obviously, a part of this, is to address the fact that we do have constituencies such as Linlithgow which have extremely high numbers, but also the proposals that we put forward, although they appear to fall just marginally short, that actually, you know, by the time that this potentially comes round then again, it could end up being one of the highest constituency electors in the country again.

CALLUM BRUNTON: I have got a question. You mentioned it is just marginally short. What about as an alternative to Blackridge bringing in Pumpherston because it is its own community council area and I believe the school catchment area goes to Uphall and I think that may be enough to bring the constituency within range.

ALLISTAIR TATTON: Yes, so --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Can I just ask your name, just for the record?

CALLUM BRUNTON: Callum Brunton.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you.

ALLISTAIR TATTON: So, yes, I mean we are obviously, you know, open to any proposals within it. I think one of the main things again, and it was coming back to that, the point that, and sorry, I forgot your name, the earlier gentleman made about community connections and histories and actually then the proposals going forward was we know that the Commission has work to do, so how can we try to offer something that is not just, "I don't want that." So actually, you have to try to make the numbers work. Now, unfortunately, it is a big jigsaw, so you move a bit here, it affects there. So, I suppose one of the things that does make a little bit of sense is how within West Lothian can you internalise some of that movement as well. So, yes.

CALLUM BRUNTON: I was partly asking the question just to celebrate that I think you have done terrific work trying to work out --

ALLISTAIR TATTON: I won't take the credit. There are people speaking later on today who have put more work in than me.

CALLUM BRUNTON: I will try to avoid repeating myself. But I suppose you have set out so many changes, like, you know, one of the first things you said about how Ratho could be integrated in and you have said it would be open to how Uphall could be used as part of that. If there was just one bit that you think is wrong with it, could you just get to the nub of which bit you think is the most in need of changing? Because we have spent quite a lot of time trying to work out the details of where the bits could come from.

ALLISTAIR TATTON: Yes. I mean, and I know it falls out of whack and the biggest concern that I personally have is there is the number change in the future, I think, because there is huge development and of course that cannot be considered. So that to me I think is, if this is to address the issue of elector size and making sure that individuals are proportionately represented the same, you know, even just from a pure numbers point of view, then we are maybe going to be facing the same issue again in a few years' time. So, as I said, Linlithgow is, you know, a very, I can't remember the exact numbers, but I am sure it is more than 70,000 electors in the Linlithgow constituency. But, you know, that is managed in a way because it is quite dense, you know, the five ward areas are within close proximity to each other and they have common issues and it is helped by the fact that there is one local authority as well, which of course for any elected representative would be then a potential challenge where if you do have communities that have different historical ties that are then crossed over two separate council areas where different policy decisions, that person could be getting asked to support one thing that works in one area within their constituency but will not work in another area because each local authority is maybe making different decisions on that as well. So I think that obviously, you know, as I said, we welcome the fact that there needs to be a change to the Linlithgow constituency. I think it is just numbers seems to have been prioritised over, and I get that it is incredibly difficult, and also just the

fact that we are slap bang in the middle, so no matter what way you move it, you move everything else around as well.

MURRAY TOSH: Could I just ask, you mentioned Bo'ness and I understand why Bo'ness could be a consideration given its past history. You would need to change the groupings to do that.

ALLISTAIR TATTON: Yes.

MURRAY TOSH: And you did not spell out any consequential changes in the Falkirk area, so can I just be clear that you are not actually proposing that Bo'ness should be considered. You are looking for a solution within West Lothian primarily.

ALLISTAIR TATTON: No, I mean, again I'll actually read out a little bit of the submissions that we have made in the first part. So, the further option, another further option for the proposed new Edinburgh and Forth and Linlithgow constituency might be to consider the current ward of Bo'ness, which is in Falkirk East constituency. Bo'ness and its communities within West Lothian, sorry, Bo'ness is a town with the closest historical links and community ties to the communities within West Lothian and even has, as I touched on, an EH post code. You know, so collectively we had said that we appreciate that that would require a review of the regions prior to consideration, but this would allow for a slightly more distinct West Lothian constituency of Linlithgow because of those more historic links with the Linlithgow, Bo'ness, South Queensbury, Kirkliston, Ratho, Winchburgh, Broxburn, Uphall, and various villages that have a clear identity as part of Linlithgowshire, and this would mean that other Edinburgh areas within the traditional Edinburgh city boundary can transfer Edinburgh, or to Edinburgh North and Leith and Edinburgh Western and Edinburgh Pentlands.

I mean, one of the things as well that, you know, we considered was actually even just the names of some of the constituencies across West Lothian. So, Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow, we made a recommendation of West Lothian and Forth. Bathgate and Almond Valley, there are obviously major towns within there, other than just Bathgate. Obviously, there is Whitburn and there is Armadale and we would suggest either West Lothian and Almond Valley as well. And it might sound silly just, you know, name changes as well. But, you know, people have to connect to that constituency if we want them to engage in the political process, then they actually have to feel as though the name represents where they live, where they stay as well.

MURRAY TOSH: If I may, a supplementary, I was actually trying to be helpful with this. Under the rules that the sheriff read out at the beginning, rule 1 says that we have to have regard to local authority boundaries, and I think in the past that has always meant that if a council has an entitlement to a whole number of constituencies that is how you have regard to these boundaries. Falkirk council has an entitlement to two constituencies.

ALLISTAIR TATTON: Yes.

MURRAY TOSH: And I think rule 1 says that that is what they have got to have. What I was trying to suggest to you was that you just focus on the West Lothian solution and if the numbers are there, that's your best bet I think to persuade the

Commission to change the details of what they proposed. This is more of a statement than a question, I am sorry.

ALLISTAIR TATTON: No, no, that is fine.

MURRAY TOSH: The question will be do you agree with me?

ALLISTAIR TATTON: Not at all. I understand. So that was almost just an aside. You can read the submission online as well. So that was just, you know, another option that the group had put forward, you know, from an identity point of view and that we understand that that is maybe something that cannot, you know, can't or wouldn't be able to be done as well. I think part of that suggestion, has come from the fact that I think the current Westminster seat is still Linlithgow and East Falkirk as well, so there already was some degree of identity within there. But certainly, the kind of main proposal that was initially put forward was the one with the many, many numbers that were put up. So, like I said, there are some of my colleagues here have contributed more towards this who will be speaking later on tonight on it.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Okay. Any more questions? No? All right, thank you very much.

ALLISTAIR TATTON: Okay. I really hope I do not have pins and needles any more.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: All right. I have no more names of people who have said that they wish to speak. Does anybody else want to make a contribution? (Pause). All right. Time wise then, that is 3 o'clock. Shall we draw stumps at that point or wait for another wee while? I think, given that it is 3 o'clock, we can assume that nobody else going to turn up to this afternoon session. There is of course an evening session where anyone can come along. So, until then I will draw the session to a close and we will resume at 6 o'clock.

(15.00)

(Adjourned for a short time)

EVENING SESSION:

(18.02)

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright, good evening, everyone. Perhaps I can just introduce myself and what we are all doing here. My name is Nigel Ross, I am the Sheriff Principal for Lothian and Borders, and we are here for the purposes of taking evidence from members of the public and others, who wish to comment on proposed changes to boundaries for elections for the Scottish Parliament. I am not part of the commission, and I have accepted the appointment only on a temporary basis, to advise and assist Boundaries Scotland. My assistance is limited to conducting local inquiries for the review of the Scottish Parliament constituencies, so my function here is not to represent anybody but simply as a neutral party who will take evidence and comments, and prepare a report which summarises the points raised. That report will be submitted to Boundaries Scotland and will be made publicly available, but for today's purposes I will take a few minutes to explain the purpose of this inquiry, the purpose of this review, and how Boundaries Scotland has gone about the whole exercise.

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. 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 carries 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, this one, must be completed by 1 May 2025 when the legislation requires that the Commission submit 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.

The rules can be summarised as follows. There are to be 73 constituencies. Three of these are protected so not under review: Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and Na h-Eileanan an Iar (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 ten percent 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 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 grouping of City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian council areas should be represented by 12 constituencies. There are currently 11 constituencies within these areas although one constituency also contains part of Scottish Borders council area which is not in this proposed grouping.

The Commission noted the challenge in designing constituencies for this grouping in respecting local government areas, while offering improved variation from the electoral quota, and taking account of local ties. Half of the existing constituencies in this grouping have a variation from the electoral quota in excess of over ten percent.

The Commission proposed 12 new constituencies for this grouping, all within ten percent variation from the electoral quota. Due to the growth in the number of electors in Edinburgh it was no longer possible to have six constituencies wholly within the Edinburgh council area boundary.

During the one-month public consultation, held between May and June 2023 the Commission received nearly 200 responses regarding the provisional proposals in the Edinburgh area, with most comments relating to the proposed Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow constituency. The respondents opposed this constituency due of a lack of ties between Muirhouse or Pilton and West Lothian.

Therefore the Commission agreed to hold this local inquiry in respect of the proposed Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow constituency due to the large number of responses relating to that constituency and that is the focus of this local inquiry today.

The Commission has already held an inquiry into the proposals for Midlothian North and Musselburgh and East Lothian, and is holding this one into Forth and Linlithgow. At this stage it is not holding any further inquiries regarding constituencies in City of Edinburgh Council area although it may do later in the review.

The Commission welcomes all comments and alternative suggestions to its provisional proposals, 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.

At the end of the local inquiry I will draft a report for the Commission with my comments and recommendations from today's proceedings. As I said earlier a transcript of today's inquiry will also be published on the Commission's website. The Commission will then consider the report with all of the responses to the public consultation on its provisional proposals for constituencies as it develops revised proposals for constituencies. The Commission will consult with those boundaries in Spring 2024 and may need to hold a further local inquiry on those boundaries if required.

So that is the background, I will now ask for the first speaker to step forward. I have a list here in no particular order, but the first name I have who has not spoken already is Ben Macpherson MSP. Mr Macpherson. Good evening, if you just want to take a seat there, your voice will be recorded on these tape recorders and this is your chance to say what you wish.

BEN MACPHERSON MSP: Thank you Sheriff Principal, and thank you to you and the whole review team for undertaking this inquiry and for your ongoing work. I first of all want to state that I welcome the review. Edinburgh Northern and Leith is currently a constituency of over 70,000 electors, which I think demonstrates the necessity of the review in terms of the calculations that have been undertaken, that the divided size would be approximately 59,000 on an equitable basis across the 70 constituencies, so I just want to start by saying, I absolutely support the need for change. However, I wanted to make a submission, and speak today regarding Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow in relation to the community of Muirhouse. The community of Muirhouse is not currently in Edinburgh Northern and Leith, it is in Edinburgh Western, but I think there is a strong argument in this process of change to include Muirhouse in Edinburgh Northern and Leith, rather than in the new constituency of Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow. The current situation with Muirhouse in Edinburgh Western has been something that myself and the constituency MSP for Edinburgh Western have managed to work with, in terms of coordination across the current boundary of Pennywell Road. However, in the

community Pennywell Road is not thought of as a boundary; while the communities of North Edinburgh are distinctive between Royston, Granton, Pilton, Drylaw and Muirhouse, collectively the area also identifies as North Edinburgh. And I have concerns that if Muirhouse is included in the new constituency of Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow, the people of Muirhouse will not feel that they are being represented in a constituency that relates to them in the same way as they would be if they were maintained in the current boundaries with Edinburgh Western and Edinburgh Northern and Leith or, in suggesting a practicable solution at this inquiry, I propose that in the boundary changes the community of Muirhouse is included in Edinburgh Northern and Leith. While I appreciate this may expand the constituency population of Edinburgh Northern and Leith, or have other external implications for the other Edinburgh constituencies, I think for the people of Muirhouse, to make sure that they have strong and local representation, to make sure that their local ties are considered, which Sheriff Principal you emphasised in your opening remarks as something that the commission is considering, and also coordination across the area, by third-sector organisations in particular, who operate on a North Edinburgh basis, I think for the benefit of serving the people of Muirhouse it would be a good outcome if they were included in Edinburgh Northern and Leith going forward. There is also precedent for this; the previous council Forth ward included Muirhouse as well as Pilton and Granton, and all the way to Trinity and Newhaven, and previously the Westminster seat included Muirhouse, and as far as I am aware the Westminster seat will now include Muirhouse. So I think in order for Muirhouse to be represented along with other parts of North Edinburgh, it would be a practical and good solution to include them in Edinburgh Northern and Leith, rather than in Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright, I will just open it up to any questions in a moment. I suppose the obvious point is as you suggest, doing that would increase the difficulty, not decrease the difficulty, beyond 70,000 electors. This is essentially a practical exercise in redrawing boundaries and it would be helpful, it is not compulsory but it would be helpful, if you could identify if you can how Edinburgh Northern and Leith could be reshaped to get back down to nearer 59,000 electors. Is there any obvious area which would be carved off into a nearby constituency?

BEN MACPHERSON MSP: So, the two polling districts that are part of Muirhouse, Muirhouse West and Muirhouse East, which my understanding is accumulates to round about 4,500 electors, and the changes proposed in the review already change the boundaries of Edinburgh Northern and Leith in a way that reduces the size of Edinburgh Northern and Leith, as I stated earlier, particularly in the areas around the Pilrig area, around the top of Leith Walk, and Inverleith, going into the Edinburgh Western constituency and Edinburgh Central constituency. I think on the east side of the constituency, which borders currently in the East Leith and Restalrig areas of the city, there could be capacity to delegate some of those electors to the new constituency of Edinburgh East and Musselburgh, but I appreciate the challenge of that also being an area of population growth. I would also say that, of course, we are anticipating future growth in Granton to quite a significant level, so Edinburgh Northern and Leith will grow, in all likelihood, again. But I appreciate the point that was made earlier, that although the review is purposed in order to try and meet an equitable amount of electors, I do think the local ties issue is something that is important, and should be considered with regard to the community of Muirhouse.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you. Would anyone like to ask Mr Macpherson a question? Yes.

FIONA HYSLOP MSP: I suppose the issue that we need to look at is a practical one of numbers, but also in terms of community I suppose, as someone who represents that area, I suppose it is the type of policy issues that you tend to get more of, in terms of Muirhouse and in relation to Northern Edinburgh, there is commonality of, I suppose, casework, and therefore the needs of constituents, which really should be at the heart of the review.

BEN MACPHERSON MSP: I absolutely agree with Fiona Hyslop MSP on that point, and I think about the Pennywell Road which is the current boundary, on the other side of that road from my constituency is the Muirhouse medical practice which both myself and the current member of Edinburgh Western have done work for, but it serves a huge number of people in Northern Edinburgh and Leith as well as in Muirhouse. I think of Craigroyston Community High School, which again sits over the road from the current constituency of Edinburgh Northern and Leith, over the Pennywell Road, but serves the whole area. So there are these institutions, and also common themes of casework, whether that is points around the challenges of these communities in terms of cost of living and social injustice, the facilities that are available in terms of youth work and how they all coordinate, the very effective new collaboration of voluntary sector organisations called the R2 Group, which is called R2 because it is R-squared, it is recovery and resurgence in terms of being able to engage with the community thereafter, all of these initiatives work across the Pennywell Road already, and I think the communities of Muirhouse would benefit from a parliamentarian or certainly... I am not saying that the current situation with Edinburgh Western has not worked, it has been fairly effective, but I do think a constituency MSP serving Muirhouse and then all the other communities within the new proposed constituency of Forth and Linlithgow, going all the way to Linlithgow, it is quite a diverse and separated proposed new constituency and I am concerned that the needs of the people of Muirhouse are likely to be very different from elsewhere in the constituency.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Okay, yes sir. Sorry, could I just have your name for the record.

PERCY FEKETEY: Percy Feketey, I represent Barnton and Cramond Community Council --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Yes.

PERCY FEKETEY: -- so we are not directly affected with what has just been said, but I would like to give wholehearted support to what Ms Hyslop and Mr Macpherson have said; I think that the linkages, even the church in Muirhouse has now linked with the Cramond kirk, it had to do that to survive. But the links, if anything, are growing as they are. Obviously in a recession state situation, people are going to come together closer, the last thing that is required is to spread to areas, particularly outside the city. So I can see the importance of balancing numbers as far as possible, but I think that the linkages are the things that the local community appreciates, even without realising it. We use these links, whether they are through the churches, or the medical practice or anything else, and I think that overrides numbers. And as the chairman said, numbers are fluctuating all the time, the council in its wisdom keeps approving more and more housing, any site that

becomes vacant anywhere, and I am also talking about congested areas like Corstorphine, more flats, more houses, more student accommodation. The net result is increasing population, so we are always going to have this situation, and what I would suggest is that, I do not know how often this sort of review place --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Every eight to twelve years.

PERCY FEKETEY: Maybe you need more, if there is a volatile situation with population change, up or down, maybe you need more --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: So your point is really future-proofing this sort of exercise.

PERCY FEKETEY: You need more reviews, more often.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Right.

PERCY FEKETEY: So I entirely agree with the you with the sentiments already expressed. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you, understood. Unless anyone else wants to ask any questions, thank you Mr Macpherson.

BEN MACPHERSON MSP: Just one correction, I should have said the local group is Response and Recovery, so I do apologise, thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright. Going through my list in no particular order, the next name I have is Fiona Hyslop MSP.

FIONA HYSLOP MSP: Good evening everyone and pleased to be here, recognise also the big task that the commission has in trying to deal with what is very much a growing population area in Edinburgh and the Lothians. I should declare my interest: I am the current MSP for the Linlithgow constituency and my current constituency, under this review, is being split into two. Two thirds is in the Bathgate and Almond Valley area, and a third would be moving into this new seat, and it is particularly a new seat that we are looking at, and in terms of the identity issues there. Can I associate myself with the written submission from the Linlithgow Constituency Association SNP, which I am taking the commission has as read, and I understand it was not originally but will be on the website for others to look at as well. This is an enormous challenge; I currently represent the most populous constituency in the whole of Scotland, Ben Macpherson currently represents the second biggest. All representatives will seek to serve the interests of constituents as best they can, but clearly if you have more constituents you will have commensurate casework as well. And I think it is probably the needs of constituents that need to, for all of us, be at the focus of the review and what this might mean. And the approach that I want to have is recognising that there are distinctive communities in this new proposed Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow seat. I will start with the comments made about the Muirhouse area in particular, I would add that I was a regional MSP from 1999 to 2011 so have represented all of Lothian, and since 2011 have represented people in the Linlithgow constituency, and I absolutely recognise the distinctive community character, nature and issues that the people of Muirhouse have, and particularly that strong connection with the Pilton, Northern Edinburgh area, so I recognise and support the concerns about that area.

Looking at the rest of the constituency, there are varying degrees of different communities, so we have heard, I think there is somebody from Cramond here, there is clearly a sort of Cramond constituency, there is an Edinburgh Western area; there is a Queensferry, Kirkliston and Ratho area; and then there is the new and expanding area of Winchburgh which will eventually be a similar size to Linlithgow; and there is Linlithgow town itself. So, there are completely different and varying, I think, communities within the proposed seat, and it is right that the Boundary Commission gives the attention to this as, I think, the one seat that is quite unique and different, compared to perhaps the other tweaks and changes that are happening elsewhere. In terms therefore of the practical challenges, how do you then recognise what could reasonably be a coalesced common community of identity? I would say that Queensferry and Kirkliston and Ratho, probably many people there still think they might be in West Lothian, might want to be in West Lothian for lots of different identity reasons, and historically were part of West Lothian. If you had the opportunity to really look at what is the effective boundary, I think the River Almond, probably, and the old Edinburgh city boundary is where that would lie from a sense of community, but the Boundary Commission have to deal in numbers, so therefore that is why the proposal that I support is one that tries to keep as much of a common identity but makes sense from the challenge that we have, to disperse population areas.

(6.30 pm)

I do think the challenge is how do you keep within that 10 per cent variance of 59,000, and the proposal that has been put forward by the Linlithgow constituency SNP I think does that, and I think common sense and, I hope, in an objective way. I do think that there are areas, particularly around Davidson's Mains and Silverknowes that are very much a kind of Edinburgh focus that I think deserve to have that identity within Edinburgh. I do think also and that therefore leads to the village of Cramond itself, which I think probably has a very strong individual identity all of its own, but, of course, I think in terms of numbers, it's quite a populous area, so there's a challenge about what you can do with that.

So, in practical sense, what are the issues and why might you want to make sure that constituents are best served by having commonality with another area? So, take, for example - and this is a practical example - transport is one of the biggest areas of interest, particularly in West Lothian. Winchburgh needs and deserves a rail station, and that's something that the local community has been campaigning on for many, many years. The common interest, I think, perhaps is not shared by Edinburgh Western because that's not a priority for them. What might be a priority and would be, certainly, for the - I think the Edinburgh area and, particularly, around the Pennywell Road, is the issue of trams, which I know is live and current. So, therefore, you've already got a kind of differences of what are the tensions between what are the main interests for those kind of areas.

There is the issue around the health board, in particular, and the interest, particularly, of the concurrency of West Lothian Council. Some people in Edinburgh West do attend and there's a common medical practice between Winchburgh, the Almond Practice, serving parts of the Queensferry area as well.

But if we conceptually understand that West Lothian itself, as an entirety, is bigger than the City of Dundee, but it isn't really treated as if it's the size of the City of Dundee. The City of Dundee is 147,000 on the last count in 2023. West Lothian was 185,000 and is growing and massive. So, therefore, the interests, actually, of the people of West Lothian, and the constituents, is not to be treated as a peripheral

area of Edinburgh, but to be treated as an area that has the importance of policy work, particularly in health and in council areas, such as housing and other common areas, and not to be seen as somehow a diluted part of Edinburgh. And so, I think in policy terms in serving constituents and what are the issues that they raise, they are quite distinct and unique.

So, therefore, turning to what the solutions might be. So, you know, we know that we've got a growing area. I think the point about future-proofing within the realms of what the rules are - and the Boundary Commission are very clear that the rules are set at a certain date and point in time - so, the proposals that have been put forward - and I think maybe just to help those that maybe have not read our submission and might want to understand that - we suggest bringing Ratho, which has had an identity and clearly has a West Lothian sense to it from a community point of view, in the past, certainly. That would bring 2,600 from Edinburgh Pentlands into the new constituency of Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow.

The other proposal is also to bring in Torphichen/Westfield, which would be from the Bathgate constituency. It already, for example, the Torphichen/Westfield children go to Linlithgow Academy. There's already a close identity with them. I think we would probably have to bring in the village of Blackridge as well to help in terms of solutions of numbers, but both Torphichen/Westfield and Blackridge are part of a council ward, which is currently the Armadale area, and so they have a linkage there already. That would add 5,700 into the new seat, because you have to bring in new voters if you were wanting to share voters elsewhere. And then the other aspect would be to transfer, as we've just discussed, Muirhouse West and Muirhouse East to the proposed Edinburgh North and Leith seat, and then also to transfer Davidson's Mains and Silverknowes to the proposed Edinburgh West seat, and that would have a transfer out of 7,708. That leaves the new proposed seat sitting at, I think it's -- sit at about 53,858.

Now, bearing in mind the future-proofing aspects of this, within reason, even by the time that this submission was made in June, the constituency, the Edinburgh Forth Linlithgow, had grown by 700. So, in terms of by the time any publication is, it will have certainly reached the 55,000 mark. But, of course, in terms of the future-proofing - and colleagues from Edinburgh will know far better than I - but the growth in Queensferry, there's massive housebuilding in Queensferry. There's major development at Ingliston and the site at Ingliston, and I think it's called the Cammo area, that area would be growing as well. The consequence of this would be to split up what's an already enormous ward, EH1, into constituent parts. I don't think you're going to be able to tackle the population challenges without doing that. I think by and large it would allow, probably, the ward to be maintained as a whole. There will be some movements, but I don't think you can do this without tackling EH1.

The other suggestions - and, I suppose, for brevity - and I am conscious other people might want to speak - how would you tackle, then, the redistribution across Edinburgh? And if you can imagine, conceptionally, sitting in Broxburn and think about a clock. Broxburn is at 6 o'clock. Edinburgh Leith Port is at 12 o'clock. What we are suggesting is from the Muirhouse area onwards, you're moving, slightly clockwise, different parts of Edinburgh seats - and we've listed them and I associate my points with that - and that would allow all the seats to be within the range that is required of either 59,000, or 10 per cent otherwise that those are. There's enormous growth anyway.

Now, can we live with that material difference for a short time? Well, as somebody who has been representing way in excess - 75,000 currently - and those constituents are part of a constituency that is that size, we've been, I suppose, out of that variance of what should be required for decades and, in fact, I think the last time there was a review, you know, West Lothian planned to be split into three at that point.

So, I think for the short time that there is increased housebuilding taking place in these areas, that the slight absence from the variance - and it would only be, I think, a couple of hundred for the proposals we're having - would enable the future-proofing, but to be within the range and, also, make sure that the common constituency interests of the constituents would be served and served well, but I would emphasise that Linlithgow and Winchburgh and the villages surrounding that, have a distinct identity themselves.

I would finally finish on the point, therefore, of identity and naming, and I think it's quite interesting that at the last Boundary Commission, Boundary Scotland would be quite happy to have give constituencies that all have the name "Edinburgh" in it, but it seems to be a struggle to have "West Lothian" in any seat. I say, currently, the name of my constituency confuses everybody because Linlithgow is one of six towns and lots of villages, whereas the constituency is called just that name, "Linlithgow".

So, our suggestion would be that the Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow would be called West Lothian and Forth, or perhaps West Lothian and West Edinburgh. The Bathgate and Almond Valley, which would be two-thirds of my current constituency that I represent, there are major towns, Whitburn and Armadale, there, so, again, why single out one town when there are a number of towns there. So, calling it West Lothian and Almond Valley, I think, would be quite obvious as well. And just to probably put into the mix if you're looking at communities and identities, the one area that would resolve all of this in a meaningful way, but strays into the central region, is Bo'ness. Bo'ness currently has clear identity with the West Lothian people. Bo'ness think that they have got those community ties. There are strong links to Linlithgow Town itself. Clear rivalries, which is probably evidence of good community connection, and that would be the old Linlithgowshire, which goes back to the point that actual identities and communities are often driven by geography, and actual community identities go far beyond any current electoral system, or any current representation. They go back decades and, perhaps in terms of Linlithgowshire, centuries, and I would appeal to an understanding of West Lothian, it is a constituency of itself and it should not just be seen as a periphery of Edinburgh.

I am delighted to suggest perhaps to the Boundary Commission if we get to a second stage of inquiry, that perhaps meeting in the West Lothian area - which, if you look in the map, is actually two-thirds, at least, of the map in geography terms - would make sense, and also in naming, I would expect West Lothian to be the first part of the name of the constituency, and the small and valued part of the Edinburgh section to be the second part of the name of the constituency is my proposal. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright, thank you. Are there any questions for Ms Hyslop? Yes.

MR MACKINTOSH: Fred Mackintosh, on behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats. I've got two questions. So, I had the opportunity of looking at Mr Tatton's letter from the Linlithgow SNP Association which you have gone through. I worked out - and I could be wrong - that the changes in the Edinburgh North and Leith and Edinburgh Western proposed in the paper, I think those two seats are over 6 per cent over quota when they were previously quite close to quota. And so, rather than getting into a mathematical squabble with you - it seems pointless - how do you feel about the idea that being quite close to quota is quite a good idea, given it's quite a long time between reviews? Why do you think it's alright for North and Leith to be 6.2 per cent over quota after the change?

FIONA HYSLOP MSP: So, we've actually heard response from the current MSP in relation to that. And, again, it depends what time you take the figure. So, if you're looking at electoral rolls - now, remember, we've got to work from the Boundary Commission's own rules, which, unfortunately, you know, it's a set point and date and time. So, we're trying to work from the rules that exist and have been governed by the Boundary Commission. If you looked at figures now, and you looked at the latest, then you would probably get higher, but that's not how the Boundary Commission works. It's got to be retrospective. So, the impact for other constituencies on the calculation with using the information that was available at the boundary rules change, would take Edinburgh Northern and Leith, of a proposed electorate of 59,650, it would take it to 63,623, which, if you take - if it is a - you know, in terms of the 10 per cent up or down that was talked about in relation to community, would be within the range of that 10 per cent and it would take it to 63,623.

Now, I do think that Edinburgh, generally, will grow even further. We know the developments that were referred to earlier in relation to Granton. So, therefore, that movement within the Edinburgh area would have to be considered. I mean, Edinburgh Western, the proposed new Edinburgh Western, would take a proposed electorate of 59,884. If you added in Davidson's Mains and Silverknowes, that would take that - again, using the Boundary Commission's deadline date and the population at that point and the electorate - to 63,619, which, again, is within the 10 per cent aspect. And I think, again, I can't speak for the communities of Davidson's Mains and Silverknowes, but I suspect they would have more in common with the Edinburgh Western communities that currently exist and would be in the new constituency, than they necessarily would have with the two-thirds of the geography of the new seat, which would be West Lothian.

MR MACKINTOSH: My second question would be - so, you made a very compelling explanation as to why the area of Linlithgow and Winchburgh has a big development pressure, and that was why you felt it was appropriate to be below quota in that new seat. We heard that. I just wondered why the same principle wouldn't also apply to the North of Edinburgh, which has also got that big development pressure, because this proposal puts it even closer to the 10 per cent boundary. So, surely there's less slack for new development there. Is that not a little bit inconsistent, that's all my question is?

FIONA HYSLOP MSP: I don't think it is because what I know about Winchburgh is - Linlithgow has less pressure as a town itself. It's more limited. It's Winchburgh which has now got two secondary schools and will be going to five, possibly six, primary schools. It gives you an idea of the size of it, and it's likely to be the same

size as Linlithgow in the future. So, the main area of development is really in the Winchburgh area and also in the Queensferry area, and also in that Cammo area, I think, and also in Ingliston. So, I think that in terms of the future pressure - which, again, the Boundary Commission is bound by looking at a certain date and times - but if we are trying to future-proof, there will be more pressure, I think, on that new Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow seat renamed, I hope, to -- you know, it will have more growth, even than the new town that we planned in the Northern Edinburgh area.

(1845)

Now, it is like you are going to have to come up with - and the Boundary Commission have got a tremendous challenge, it's a really difficult challenge and I understand that. So, that's why we're trying to identify some of the changes. So, even, as I said, moving some of those numbers around, for example in Edinburgh Pentlands, all you'd be doing is restoring some of the areas back into Edinburgh Pentlands that used to be part of the parliamentary seat. So, we are trying to be kind of fairly objective on it, but I think in terms of I suppose that identity, I think that growing bank of houses, basically from Ingliston to Cammo, Queensferry, Winchburgh, there's a whole track there, that will certainly take very quickly the new constituency not only up to the 59,000 mark, but over it within, I suspect, the timescale for the next review in any case.

PATRICK MITCHELL: Thank you. Could I identify myself as a resident of Cammo --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Could I just have your name for the record please?

PATRICK MITCHELL: Patrick Mitchell.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you, Mr Mitchell.

PATRICK MITCHELL: There are virtually no community links beyond the greenbelt from, say Edinburgh west out. So, the way it's being amalgamated at the moment we are a peripheral area at the moment, it has doubled in size in the last four years. We are part of the Edinburgh West development. When you look at that and you quite rightly say that the Forth area is an identified community and it's not peripheral to Edinburgh, we are moving very much into that exact same thing where we will be extremely peripheral to the bulk or the weight of the Forth constituency, simply because, you know, I can't catch public transport to anywhere without going into Edinburgh and going out. It's the way that for planning decisions and so forth we will be consulting with a local MP who will not be up to the local development plan. It will be Edinburgh local development plan that we're working to. And as we've already pointed out the plans that are in place at the moment for Ingliston and - well Cammo is growing. There is significant development pressure on the west of Edinburgh. Because we're having to looking retrospectively, we are going to be effectively kicked out, I would say, at the next boundary review whenever that happens because of the pressures coming on, but it's for the administrative purposes of kind of balancing numbers, it feels like you're basically carving out a wee bit of Edinburgh that, you know, the focus is always into Edinburgh. I really don't know, it's either Edinburgh or Fife - it's not really moving from the people of Cammo certainly, but we are a very small --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: I think, just to try and summarise what you're saying, you're approaching matters in the opposite angle from Ms Hyslop. She's talking about starting off with West Lothian and seeing what's been included. You are

worried about being in part of the constituency that's now been annexed to West Lothian or Edinburgh Forth or Linlithgow or whatever you are calling it.

PATRICK MITCHELL: Yes, we'll apply for a boundary – you know the boundary for Edinburgh is --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Yes.

PATRICK MITCHELL: -- a matter of a mile or so up the road from us with effectively the greenbelt. And we've got continuous development through to the far side of Edinburgh yet it's kind of carving off a bit purely to make up numbers.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: But just to understand the point you're making, it is, I think, that the interests of the Cammo residents are it will not align with those of West Lothian, Linlithgow and so forth because your transport is different areas.

PATRICK MITCHELL: Yes. Transport is different, local development plans are different, councils are different. We all have councillors for, effectively one district and MSPs for others.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Okay. I do not mean to set up Ms Hyslop as the straw man for the focus of the questions, unless there's anything you want of Ms Hyslop in particular. I can take your evidence separately on that. Is there anything else you would like to say on that?

FIONA HYSLOP: I just have quite a bit of sympathy for that as well because this is artificial for numbers. It's not necessarily about communities and I think the point is the people of Cammo and Ingliston and Winchburgh and Queensferry, a lot of the issues and the policy issues and concerns they will have will be about housing development, will be about transport, all these issues, but they will be being dealt with by two separate different councils. So, that's a challenge. Unfortunately the Boundary Commission have to work on numbers and the current three West Lothian seats, ideally, I would like three complete ones, potentially, but I don't think you can do that. Unless you add in Bo'ness, you can't do that within the numbers that are required. And I think that's a tension that is having to be resolved as part of this inquiry, which is does community trump electoral numbers in terms of planning. That's not for me to answer; that's for the Boundary Commission, but I think you made your point very well.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Ms Hyslop, thank you very much for your contribution and we'll move onto the others who have come. The next name on my numbered list is Fred Mackintosh, Scottish Liberal Democrats. Mr Mackintosh, if you want to take your seat there. Now, what would you like to say?

FRED MACKINTOSH: So, my name is Fred Mackintosh. I am representing the Scottish Liberal Democrats today. I am joined by two colleagues, Councillor Kevin Lang from Almond Ward and Councillor Sally Pattle from the Linlithgow Ward and they can speak for themselves, so I will stop doing that.

The purpose of my remarks was simply to address the alternative proposal from Linlithgow Constituency SNP Association, dated 16 June 2023, which I have just heard Ms Hyslop very accurately defend from her perspective and in making these observations I note that the Scottish Labour Party in its responses did not propose

an alternative for the Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow constituency, but it did reserve its position to do so later, and the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party did support the proposed Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow constituency. The Scottish Liberal Democrats alternative proposal, which has already been lodged seeks to reduce the number of wards which are divided between Scottish Parliament constituencies compared to the Commission's existing proposed provisional proposal and to attempt to push to keep seats closer to electoral quota. Our proposal, in essence, leaves the Livingston constituency, the positions in and around Livingston and the rest of West Lothian, untouched, but reduces the number of constituencies that are away from quota to four, which have a variance from quota of greater than five and a half per cent, from six under the Commission's proposals and splits only six wards across the 12 Lothian and Edinburgh constituencies compared to nine from the Commission's provisional proposals. Now, speaking personally I was a City of Edinburgh councillor many years ago and I am conscious that there is often never a right answer in terms of splitting communities in a boundary proposal because however much it would be nice not to have artificial distinctions, the tremendous prosperity of West Lothian means it has more right to more MSPs than it has before, but not hold numbers of MSPs and since you can't divide numbers of MSPs in part, you have to have constituencies that cross boundaries. Community planning is always difficult and it's the Scottish Liberal Democrat position that whole wards are best placed in single constituencies because it makes the best fist of a difficult problem. There is always going to be a boundary effect, but at least if the councillors are facing in one direction that does help.

Looking at the Linlithgow SNP proposal, I did notice that the proposed Edinburgh North and Leith constituency would be 6.2 per cent over quota, which is a substantial increase over the Commission's original proposal. The Edinburgh West constituency will also be approximately 6.2 per cent over quota compared to being almost entirely on the money with the commission proposal. And I noticed that the West Lothian proposal required there to be changes that were undefined between the various West Lothian seats around Torphichen and I appreciate that I may not have the local knowledge to understand those changes, but I think it is important that the Commission is provided with maps and details to properly consider and, of course, that the new Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow constituency would be well below quota, which would be a dramatic contrast with other seats in the area. And for that reason, I would encourage the Commission to keep to proposals that don't split wards and bring the whole of Almond Ward into the new proposed constituency for clarity, if not perfection and for that reason I would commend those proposals. I am happy to take questions.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Are there any questions for Mr Mackintosh? Sorry, can I just have your name for the record?

KENNETH ANDERSON: Yeah, my name is Kenneth Anderson.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Okay.

KENNETH ANDERSON: And I am here representing the Linlithgow Constituency Association as well. I certainly don't intend to go into the same detail as that would just be repeating the aspects, but we made our recommendations really with a view to being open minded about the changes because we absolutely understand the challenges that the Commission have. Are deliverable proposals available for us to

look at and consider because obviously it's difficult for us to know what it is that you're proposing until we can see some of the detail.

FRED MACKINTOSH: Yes, they are. I think they are document 516 on the Commission's website --

KENNETH ANDERSON: Okay.

FRED MACKINTOSH: -- and there is a single document for the whole country, which seemed easier at the time. We didn't make the mistake, if I can take a cheap shot at somebody who isn't here, of sending it in by post because the Conservative document only discovered this morning that it's scanned in as a photographic record and you can't search it by its names, which was somewhat of a challenge, but it is there. And in essence, what it involves doing is bringing Ratho itself into the new constituency. So, the whole of Almond Ward is in, but otherwise from the point of view of Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow, making no other changes. There were other changes proposed in the report around the rest of Edinburgh to reduce ward splitting around the boundary between Southern and Pentlands, but I don't think that's the purpose today, so I won't go into it for fear of getting into trouble, but it is available on the website.

KENNETH ANDERSON: That would be helpful. We did try and search for all of the comments that had been made and we were only able to do so by looking at the kind of name over the new constituency, which is why --

FRED MACKINTOSH: So, I think the national party ones are often harder to find unless you look for them specifically.

KENNETH ANDERSON: That's maybe why there's a benefit of the local constituencies taking interest in these issues.

CALLUM BRUNTON: So, I know that you - I am Callum BRUNTON, sorry.

FRED MACKINTOSH: Yes, I remember.

CALLUM BRUNTON: I noticed that you referenced that Edinburgh Northern proposal by the SNP. I am not representing SNP, but I've just looked at your proposals for the Liberal Democrats. The Midlothian South proposal is 7.5 per cent over quota and I believe that is the highest area of house growth in the whole of Scotland. So, how do you reconcile that with future development and future proofing that in constituencies?

FRED MACKINTOSH: Well, that is the Commission's proposal. We didn't change Midlothian South.

CALLUM BRUNTON: Right.

FRED MACKINTOSH: I suspect they're probably a victim of the ward sizes in Midlothian because that's how it worked out, but we haven't proposed a change. That's the original commission plan of 7.5 per cent.

FIONA HYSLOP: Can I just ask?

FRED MACKINTOSH: Yes, sure.

FIONA HYSLOP: Does your submission talk about the names in any sense and profile obviously the importance of the vast majority of new seats being in West Lothian?

FRED MACKINTOSH: No, we've got into the habit of not talking about the names until the second stage --

FIONA HYSLOP: Okay.

FRED MACKINTOSH: -- because it seems less stressful to wait until the Commission produces revised changes.

FIONA HYSLOP: So, we have a starter for ten for the Liberal Democrats.

FRED MACKINTOSH: Well, we're going to wait until I think we see what the actual proposals are. And you get that second opportunity.

FIONA HYSLOP: Yes.

FRED MACKINTOSH: And it seems invidious to get into it. I mean, absolutely names are a terribly important thing. Having once represented a ward called, Newington that didn't contain any streets with the word Newington in the name, I do absolutely appreciate that names are important. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: All right. Unless there are any other questions, thank you very much Mr Mackintosh. The next name I have here is Councillor Kevin Lang from Edinburgh City Council. Councillor Lang, if you want to take your seat, please.

CLLR KEVIN LANG: Thank you. At the risk of repeating some of the comments that have been made, Sheriff Principal, I think it is worth recognising that the Commission have had within the Lothian area a very, very difficult task and because I sometimes have too much time on my hands I did actually go and look at the minutes of the Commission and looked at the alternative options that had been considered before the initial proposals were published and it just struck me that there were no simple, easy or straightforward options given the simple arithmetic, which I think, broadly speaking, sees West Lothian at about two and a half constituencies and Edinburgh at about six and a half constituencies. And so, when you do have the mathematical straitjacket that exists on the Commission, I do recognise there are some very, very difficult choices that have to be made.

So, I am Councillor Kevin Lang, I am the councillor - one of the four councillors for the Almond Ward, 90 per cent of which goes into the new Linlithgow and Edinburgh Forth seat under the initial proposals, which the Commission have published. The Almond Ward has existed in some way, shape or form for almost 17 years now and whilst many individuals talk about historical connections between communities, as you can imagine as a serving local councillor for the Almond Ward I very much care about current and existing connections, and given the fact that the Almond Ward has involved these different communities together in one single council ward for some time I would be very concerned about proposals that would see the ward that I represent fragmented.

(19.00)

Now, one of the merits of the Commission's initial proposals is, as I say, that the vast bulk of my ward goes into one single constituency. I think it is worth, for me, emphasising that I agree with the tweak which was in the Liberal Democrats' submission that would see that remaining 10 per cent also go into the new constituency, and that matters for this reason. So, under the initial proposals, the two villages of Ratho Station and Newbridge are split. These, whilst being two different villages, are very close geographically and have exceptionally strong ties between them, shown by the fact that despite the fact that they are two separate villages, they have a single resident's association; they have the same school catchments; they share the same GP services. And so, for what would be a fairly minimal numeral change, we're talking really about only a couple of hundred houses, it would obviously add to the simplicity of having all of my ward in one single constituency, and I think that small tweak could be made, Sheriff Principal, without any significant impact upon overall numbers.

But why is it important to try and maintain whole council wards? I actually think that's been one of the guiding principles of the Commission over many years, to try and retain all council wards within single constituencies, wherever that is possible, and obviously when you look at the Almond Ward over the last 17 years, a number of connections have been built up between the different communities. So, when I look at the fact that we have a single neighbourhood network now, we have different forums, including a community safety forum, an individual who's been heavily involved in that in the past, we have funding panels when it comes to community grants that exists across the single Almond Ward, but it's not just about operational efficiency. It's also about the issues which tie together the different communities in my ward, and some of them have been touched upon already. So, there are big issues around greenbelt and development, and new housing developments, which impacts right across my entire ward. We have issues relating to Edinburgh Airport, not something that's been talked about so far, that impacts Queensferry and Kirkliston and Cramond. We could be looking - well, we are going to be having a consultation this year on changes to the flight paths at Edinburgh Airport that will affect all the different communities, potentially, in my ward. The River Almond runs straight through it with a lot of environmental issues that sit there. Health and education facilities, a lot of the challenges there are consistent across the different communities. And as I say, with the tweak, I think that's one of the benefits of having all of the ward within one single constituency. And when I looked at the other options which the Commission considered before they came up with their original proposal, the other options involved fragmenting my ward to a far greater level, and you've heard some of the comments already about how some of the other proposals that were presented by the Scottish National Party would, I think, involve splitting the ward that I represent across three different constituencies with all the complexity and challenge that I think that would bring. So, as I say, I recognise the incredible difficulties which the Commission have faced in this process. I don't think there are any easy answers, otherwise I suspect the Commission would have grabbed those easy answers in terms of their initial proposals. But I really sit here as a councillor asking the Commission to really give very careful consideration to making a difficult situation worse by alternative proposals which would see my ward split up across even more constituencies, and I think they should take the opportunity to try and ensure that that entire ward is within one parliamentary constituency.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright, thank you. Anyone want to ask any questions of Councillor Lang?

BEN MACPHERSON MSP: Thank you, and thank you, Councillor Lang. It's good working with you in your current capacity and my current capacity over at Pennywell Road.

I appreciate the guiding philosophy in your argument of maintaining your ward, of Almond Ward, within one Scottish Parliament constituency. However, the arguments you made for including the 10 per cent that's currently excluded, are very similar in principle to some of the arguments I make for including Muirhouse within the Edinburgh North and Leith constituency in terms of the community ties and local facilities. And I am not saying this in a critical way, but given that you didn't touch on Muirhouse in your remarks, I just wondered if you had any points that you wanted to make about your experience of representing Muirhouse, and I know you know the North Edinburgh area well, and I'm sure you'd agree with me that Muirhouse feels like it's part of North Edinburgh historically and in the current time. So, I just wondered if you had any comment to make to your overriding philosophy of maintaining everything from your ward within the one parliamentary constituency.

CLLR LANG: So, for clarity, Muirhouse is part of the Almond Ward, and so when I talk about keeping the whole of the Almond Ward together, I mean that, in terms of the current Almond Ward.

I think it's interesting that, you know, since the creation of the Scottish Parliament, actually, Muirhouse has come west in terms of parliamentary representation, and it was interesting that in the last local government boundary change, Muirhouse, of course, came out of the Forth Ward and was transferred into the Almond Ward. I don't know if I would wholly agree with your analysis that Pennywell Road is in no way any kind of boundary. I'm conscious of the Community Council boundary goes down Pennywell Road. I'm very conscious that school catchment boundaries go down Pennywell Road. For the purpose of some local policing, I'm pretty sure that Pennywell Road is the boundary there too.

So, I don't deny that there are obvious connections when it comes to North Edinburgh, but certainly when it comes to representation at a local council and at a Scottish parliamentary basis, for as long as I've been involved in elected politics, certainly at Scottish Parliament level, Muirhouse has come west.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Just observe that, in fact, you are at complete odds over the same area of Muirhouse, would that be right?

CLLR MACPHERSON: Yes, I would argue that while Councillor Lang is absolutely, of course, factually correct in stating that Muirhouse has been part of the west constituency with regard to the Scottish Parliament elections, historically, before the Scottish Parliament, it was included in the constituency of Edinburgh and North and Leith and, certainly, when I engage with several organisations that are currently located in Edinburgh Western but operate across the North Edinburgh communities, they have spoken to me about how they don't see it as logical, or helpful, that they're in a different constituency. Certainly, a number of stakeholders have made that point strongly to me over the last years that I've represented the constituency of Edinburgh North and Leith since 2016.

CLLR LANG: And I just, Sheriff Principal, just to answer the point, that I think it was 27 years ago that Muirhouse came west when it came from Westminster elections. I think historically it was from Westminster elections, but since the creation of the

Scottish Parliament over 20 years ago, Muirhouse has come west. That has not been a recent change.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you. Ms Hyslop.

FIONA HYSLOP MSP: Sorry, I'll declare interest. 27 years ago I was candidate for the Pilton Muirhouse as a collective seat at that point in the Edinburgh Council elections at that time.

Two policy issues. One is to do with the Muirhouse area. I'm very conscious that a lot of the issues are about poverty, jobs ... trying to make sure there's regeneration, and a lot of the regeneration to help benefit the Pilton Muirhouse area is located around - you know, where Granton is, you've got a number of institutions deliberately making sure that their position there in terms of national museums, the new development from the National Galleries of Scotland, for example, all those developments are facing the Forth and are in the north area. So, by having one representation, not from that whole area, do you think that may have an implication as to the benefit that the people of Muirhouse may have or perceive in how they are served by institutions, many of whom are national institutions, and have that connection?

CLLR LANG: So, my, kind of, core argument is there is not going to be a local government boundary review in Edinburgh this cycle. We've been told that. So, my interest is to make sure that the whole ward goes into a single constituency, because I think that is good for simplicity, and I think it has been one of the guiding principles for the Commission over a long period of time. So, applying that principle of the ward that I represent, all of it in its entirety, I think there are significant benefits when it comes to representation of ensuring that single ward, that is four councillors, has one local MSP. I think that's a significant benefit and, as I say, I'm very conscious that the alternative that's been presented by the SNP, would see my ward split three ways. I find that very concerning.

FIONA HYSLOP MSP: Can I ask a second question?

Again, you talked about Edinburgh Airport, which, again, is a good example where transport is a key issue for constituents going forward, and the last time that Edinburgh Airport looked to expand their airspace, there was actually genuinely conflicting interest of the people of Cramond, who obviously were, and can still be, majorly affected by the routes, and the constituencies of Winchburgh and Uphall and Broxburn.

(19.13)

And in terms of the issue if you want your MSP to represent you, and obviously that is what you would expect from any elected representative, any party, etc, but there will be quite distinctive policy interests in transportation. I have mentioned already trams versus train station, for example, bus routes and bus issues are quite distinctive. And also in terms of Edinburgh Airport there are distinctive differences between the interests potentially of what we expect when we come and it's similar in any way, shape or form to what has happened before in terms of where those flight paths will go and disrupt and therefore any elected member will obviously have to represent different communities and that is maybe a good example of where there are quite distinctive view, do you have any sense of that?

COUNCILLOR KEVIN LANG: So, two points on that. Or, firstly, to be fair, I may have misheard when you were describing what was going where in the SNP proposals, but it did sound like Davidson's Mains and Silverknowes was going into Edinburgh

Western, Cramond was staying in the Linlithgow seats. If that conflict does exist, the alternative proposals wouldn't resolve that. However, I actually fundamentally disagree with the premise that there is a conflict of interests between the different communities because actually, I don't want to get too technical for the purpose of the Commission, the Cramond interest has been a change in the eastbound flight path that was not impacting West Lothian. There was a conflict with Fife. There was not an impact on West Lothian. The West Lothian changes were around westerly departures. And so actually the Cramond interest, there was no downside to the Cramond changes except for Dalgety Bay and Fife.

FIONA HYSLOP MSP: So maybe that is a separate issue perhaps to take offline as to what actually was being represented, but there was an increased number ... decrease on the Cramond and an increase in terms of flights over West Lothian. But I think I only mention that to illustrate that the actual issue is not about any councillor or any council ward. It is going to have to actually be about the interests of the constituents and their community identity and the issues that affect them and the policies, etc. So I think that is where probably hopefully all of us agree that actually it is quite a varied constituency in terms of that area. Is that something that you recognise that perhaps compared to all the other Edinburgh seats it probably is the one that has the least, I suppose, continuity of community interests compared to other seats.

COUNCILLOR KEVIN LANG: I think every constituency is diverse, um, even the ward that I represent, Sheriff Principal, is a diverse ward in terms of its make-up. I think inevitably when you are coming to a point where you have got 60,000 individuals being represented you have got different communities, you have got different interests, you have got different perspectives, you will have some areas of affluence, you will have some areas of poverty. I actually think, dare I say, and I say this as somebody who represents different communities as an elected representative, I actually think that is actually quite a healthy thing in a democracy. I think it is actually good as an elected representative to have different perspectives and to have different interests in which you can serve to represent. Does the proposed new constituency have diversity? Yes, it absolutely does.

FIONA HYSLOP: Apologies, Sheriff Principal, for interrupting there.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: No, it is fine. It is a real, valid point. I was trying to summarise what you are saying, but it seems that an identity of MSP is less important than an identity of historic ties. Is that what you're saying?

COUNCILLOR KEVIN LANG: So, I would like to talk more about current ties as opposed to ties that existed literally 50 years ago. And, as I say, I think there is also enormous benefit in having a single, complete ward in a constituency where that is possible and I think one of the few, dare I say, benefits of the challenge the Commission have got is that it is possible to, with the small tweak that we have talked about that is a very small number of people, it is possible to actually have the whole of the Almond ward within one constituency that meets the Commission's electoral quota requirements.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: I think you are just reciting rule 1, so I would agree with that.

COUNCILLOR KEVIN LANG: Okay.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you very much.

COUNCILLOR KEVIN LANG: Thank you very much.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: All right, the next name on my list is Councillor Sally Pattle for West Lothian council. Good evening. If you would like to take a seat, please?

COUNCILLOR SALLY PATTLE: Thank you. Okay, thanks very much for having me. I am going to be extremely brief and not as technical as my colleagues. But I would just like to say thanks very much for giving me the opportunity to speak today because, you know, I would like to echo what everybody has said about how difficult the process obviously has been, particularly considering the area that we are discussing. I would also like, you know, I'm here today to support the Liberal Democrats' submission, which does broadly support the original boundary changes just with a very small tweak as Councillor Lang has discussed, so I don't need to repeat any of that.

My name is Sally Pattle and I am a Lib Dem councillor for the Linlithgow ward, which borders Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh to the east, and then also the Falkirk region to the north. Blackness and Bo'ness are our immediate neighbours, so we are sort of in a little enclave. I grew up in Linlithgow and growing up there it was always very obvious to me that our community ties lay more closely with Kirkliston, South Queensferry and Blackness, rather than with communities like Bathgate, which are further to the west of the county.

And I am going to slightly contradict Kevin because historically, which I think is very important, being a history graduate, for centuries in fact we were all part of Linlithgowshire, so geographically from Linlithgow as far as South Queensferry we were part of Linlithgowshire. This was actually the case until the 1960s and those long-standing regional ties have remained very close in the intervening decades. It really has not been that long since we were ripped apart. There is a sense of commonality between historic boroughs like Linlithgow, Dalmeny and South Queensferry, plus our local economies these days really are much more reliant on hospitality and tourism in particular. So we do face the same opportunities and challenges on an economic level.

As has been discussed at length, there is huge development current going on in Winchburgh, Kirkliston, South Queensferry and Cammo and there have been areas of future development identified in Linlithgow, which should not be too far away, if the local place plan is adopted, as expected. So again these new constituency boundaries, they make sense because residents will be facing similar issues in terms of service provision, access to healthcare and transport.

And I think my final point is about transport connectivity. Again, we are much more closely aligned with the settlements in the proposed boundary changes. It is far easier to reach Winchburgh or Edinburgh from Linlithgow than it is to get to Bathgate, for example. The road network and the public transport network are all geared towards people travelling to and from the capital, as has been mentioned by the resident from Cammo earlier, rather than getting across West Lothian to places like Livingstone. It is not easy unless you have a car. I therefore believe that these proposed changes will be advantageous because one MSP will be able to work on

behalf of residents experiencing the same issues to a large degree. And that was all.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you.

COUNCILLOR SALLY PATTLE: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Any questions for Councillor Pattle? Right.

COUNCILLOR SALLY PATTLE: That's great, thanks very much. Nice and brief.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: All right, Mr Anderson, do you want to give us a presentation?

KENNETH ANDERSON: Good evening, Sheriff Principal, and thank you for the opportunity for Linlithgow constituency SNP to speak again. We spoke this afternoon and I intend to be as brief as my colleague, Sally Pattle, in terms of what I intend to say, mainly because it was articulated far better by Fiona Hyslop MSP in terms of our paper that we have put forward for discussion and debate and I am really pleased that the paper that we have put forward has prompted discussion and debate in respect of thinking about how we as a local constituency SNP, and I would stress that the comments that we make are not from the party nationally but from our local Linlithgow party, the Linlithgow constituency party, in terms of the solutions that we have come forward.

And again our methodology in respect of that was looking at very much the kind of solutions that we could focus on in terms of the challenges which we believe the Boundaries Commission have in terms of the quota number which they have to reach and the tensions that that then causes with local communities and whilst quite rightly we were thinking very much of our communities within West Lothian. I think it would be fair to say that as we move into Edinburgh those tensions become far more challenging in respect of the ties of a constituency. And whilst the Boundary Commission has to be very mindful of rule 1, it also has to be mindful of rule 3 in terms of the geographic challenges which this new constituency will bring to where we are. So I do not tend to rehearse the numbers issues, they are laid out in our paper. They are there for due consideration.

One aspect I would perhaps clarify and working with Councillor Pattle in terms of the areas certainly of Torphichen and Westfield have also been very close to Linlithgow, in fact we shared a council seat with the areas of Torphichen and Westfield not that long ago. Torphichen and Westfield are part currently of the Armadale, Blackridge, Westfield, Torphichen, multi-council ward and that is why we felt there was a sense in terms of including Blackridge there as well, in order to assist with the quota number and the comfort of 10 per cent in terms of the quota number. So again I am happy to answer any questions that anybody may have in terms of the proposal that was put forward by the Constituency Association.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you. Any questions for Mr Anderson? (Pause).

COUNCILLOR KENNETH ANDERSON: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you very much. The next name I have here is Pauline Orr.

FIONA HYSLOP: I think she might be ill.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Yes, I think she did not confirm, so I am not sure. Thank you for passing that on. We have, the last one is again a possible, Daniel Johnson MSP that must be. I think he may have resolved his matters in writing rather than appearing here. So that is entirely understandable. All right, I think, Mr Mitchell, do you want to say any more? I think I understood what you said. Do you want to add any more to your submission?

PATRICK MITCHELL: Um, not really. Probably almost (inaudible) statement from a resident is actually affected by this (inaudible). That is it.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: It is entirely up to you. Thank you. I understood what you said before. Is there anybody else who wants to say anything else? All right, at which point we seem to have reached the end of everyone who wants to contribute. We are not expecting anybody else to come along. Good. In which case, thank you very much for your submissions. They are all very interesting. Rather difficult to reconcile, I have to say, but I anticipate that I may not be recommending wholeheartedly any one solution because there is no one solution, but I will certainly reflect what you have said and pass my report on to Boundaries Scotland and it will be published. Right, thank you very much to you all. I think we can terminate matters there.

FIONA HYSLOP: Thank you.

COUNCILLOR KEVIN LANG: Thank you.
(19.25)
(The Evening Session Adjourned at 20.00)