

SCOTLAND ACT 1998 as amended by

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT (CONSTITUENCIES) ACT 2004

REPORT

By

Sheriff Principal S F Murphy KC

**In respect of a Local Inquiry onto the provisional recommendations of Boundaries Scotland relating to the Scottish Parliament Constituencies in the local authority areas of Glasgow City, Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde**

**Background**

1. Boundaries Scotland is statutory commission which is obliged under Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998, as amended, to review the boundaries of mainland electoral constituencies for the Scottish Parliament and to report to the Scottish Parliament at intervals of between eight and twelve years. The present review requires that a report be submitted to the Scottish Parliament by 1 May 2025. It relates only to the boundaries for Scottish Parliament elections and does not alter the boundaries of local government areas, school catchment or community council areas, nor does it affect the arrangements for local council or health services or for council tax.
2. Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998 established the following rules for conducting reviews of Scottish Parliamentary Boundaries:

Rule 1 – So far as is practical, regard must be had to the boundaries of local government areas;

Rule 2 – (1) The electorate of a constituency must be as near the electoral quota as is practical, having regard to Rule 1; and

(2) Boundaries Scotland may depart from the strict application of 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 – Boundaries Scotland may depart from the strict application of Rules 1 and 2 if it thinks that special geographical considerations (including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency) render it desirable to do so; and

Rule 4 – Boundaries Scotland need not aim at giving full effect in all circumstances to Rules 1 to 3 but must take account (so far as it reasonably can)

(a) of the inconveniencies attendant on alterations of constituencies other than alterations made for the purposes of Rule 1; and

(b) of any local ties which would be broken by such alterations.

3. The electoral quota is determined by dividing the total number of local government electors on the September 2022 electoral registers by 70, being the number of mainland constituencies in Scotland. For the current review the electoral quota 59,902 electors per constituency. It is generally considered that a variation of 10% from the electoral quota is acceptable.
4. The Commission may exercise its discretion in deciding the appropriate weight to be attached to each of the above rules in the circumstances of a particular constituency. It does not take account of the results of previous elections nor does it speculate on any effect which its recommendations may have on future voting patterns or on the political composition of the Scottish Parliament. The main concern for the Boundaries Commission arises as a result of the need to take account of the movement of electors within Scotland.
5. Proposals are published during the review and members of the public are encouraged to respond. A Local Inquiry must be held if representations objecting to the Commission's provisional proposals are received from a local authority for an area within a constituency or region or from 100 or more electors for a constituency or 500 for a region. The Commission may also hold a discretionary Local Inquiry if it needs further information regarding a constituency or region. The purposes of a Local Inquiry are: to get to know

local opinion; to hear criticism of, or support for, the published proposals; to receive counter proposals; and to enable everyone who wishes to do so to comment on the Commission's proposals and any counter proposals. In the present instance objections and opposition were expressed by East Renfrewshire Council and Renfrewshire Council to the provisional proposals in relation to the constituencies in their areas, including Glasgow Priesthill and Giffnock, Paisley and Renfrew, Renfrewshire South and Renfrewshire West. Some 2,000 responses were received from individuals or local bodies expressing opposition to the proposals in the Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire Council areas. Accordingly a Local Inquiry was set down for 14 December 2023, to be held over two sessions, one at 2pm at the Lynnhurst Hotel, Johnstone and the other at 6pm at the Parkhurst Hotel, Newton Mearns. By letter dated 6 December 2023 I was appointed to chair that Local Inquiry.

### **Summary of the Proposals – Johnstone/Newton Mearns Local Inquiry**

6. Boundaries Scotland prepared provisional proposals based on council area groupings. It was decided that the combined groupings of Glasgow City, Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, and Inverclyde council areas should be represented by twelve constituencies in place of the pre-existing thirteen, ten of which were significantly below the electoral quota for the present review. The Commission's provisional proposals divided five Glasgow City wards between constituencies; only seven wards were divided overall across the four Council areas. The proposed Glasgow Priesthill and Giffnock constituency included parts of the areas of East Renfrewshire and Glasgow City Councils and a further seven Glasgow constituencies. The proposed Renfrewshire South constituency included parts of the council areas of East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire. The Commission also proposed a Paisley and Renfrew constituency, a Renfrewshire West constituency and an Inverclyde constituency which followed the boundary of Inverclyde Council area. All twelve of the proposed constituencies were within 10% of the electoral quota.

### **Submissions made at the Local Inquiry – afternoon session (Johnstone)**

7. Councillor Andy Doig, the independent councillor for the ward of Johnstone North, Kilbarchan, Howwood and Lochwinnoch, objected to the proposals in relation to the areas which he represented. The constituency arrangements for Renfrewshire took little account of local authority areas, would break established community and administrative ties and created constituencies with no cohesive transport links. Voter apathy and confusion would follow which was dangerous for democracy in modern times. Renfrewshire communities should not be separated because Glasgow had a declining population. Boundary change occurred too often.
8. The provisional proposals would conflate Paisley and Renfrew into a single seat but would partition Johnstone. Paisley and Renfrew were old historic towns which deserved their own representation in the Scottish Parliament.
9. Johnstone would be partitioned, with part of it joining Lochwinnoch, Kilbarchan and Howwood in a new Renfrewshire South constituency which would stretch as far as Eaglesham. The concerns of Councillor Doig's constituents would be lost among those of Clarkston, Newton Mearns and Eaglesham which would form a majority of the proposed new constituency. History, local ties and local services clearly indicated that Johnstone, Linwood, Kilbarchan, Howwood and Lochwinnoch should all be in the same constituency not least because of the existing arrangements for local authority grant funding to these communities. The villages traditionally had stronger ties to Johnstone than to Paisley. The UK Boundaries Commission proposed that Linwood be transferred to a Paisley and Renfrewshire South constituency for elections to Westminster. The contrasting Boundaries Scotland proposal would cause substantial voter confusion and apathy for the nearly 10,000 electors of Linwood. Moving between parts of the proposed new constituency by public transport would require taking a bus or train into Glasgow and back out again. Residents across the area were zoned for health purposes to four different hospitals. The proposed new constituency was like a patchwork quilt of disparate interests. Many parts of East Renfrewshire were within the Glasgow Corporation area before 1974 and configuration with the city would be more workable for most of East

Renfrewshire. Barrhead and Neilston were formerly within the Renfrew District Council area so wards 1 and 2 of East Renfrewshire Council should remain within Renfrewshire South.

10. Erskine, Bishopston, Langbank and Bridge of Weir looked to Renfrew rather than Paisley for essential local government services. The integrity of their economic links crucially depended on their remaining with Renfrew and not being placed in a new constituency with Paisley. It made more sense for Cardonald, ward 4 of Glasgow City Council's area, to be within the new constituency centred on Paisley in terms of history, transport and economic links.
11. These counter proposals would create new constituencies which were above the electoral quota: Renfrewshire South and East - 65,865 (East Renfrewshire Council's wards 1 and 2; and Renfrewshire Council wards 8, 9 and 10); Renfrewshire North and West – 63,204 (Renfrewshire Council wards 1, 2, 4, 11 and 12); and Paisley and Cardonald – 63,259 (Glasgow City Council ward 4 and Renfrewshire Council wards 3, 5, 6 and 7).
12. In answer to questions from the floor, Councillor Doig confirmed that under his proposals Newton Mearns would be split between East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire South. He had omitted to allocate the Newton Mearns South and Eaglesham ward to any constituency; it might have to be accommodated within the scheme for South Lanarkshire.
13. Thomas Wallace, Chairman of Johnstone Community Council, spoke in his personal capacity. He indicated that general feeling within Johnstone was against the provisional proposals. Johnstone had no links with Newton Mearns or Eaglesham and transport connections there were non-existent. Johnstone would fit better with parts of Northern Paisley. Gleniffer Braes formed a natural barrier between Johnstone and East Renfrewshire. Johnstone should not be split. Local ties would be lost and communities split, leading to voter apathy as people would feel that they were not being listened to. Local people would prefer that Johnstone be kept together and be aligned with Paisley, its

administrative centre. Johnstone people would be disadvantaged at elections by inclusion with the larger population of East Renfrewshire.

14. Councillor Janis McDonald (Paisley Northwest) spoke as a local resident from Linwood. She was concerned at the proposed partitioning of Johnstone and the separation of Linwood from parts of Johnstone. She supported much of what Councillor Doig had said, particularly in relation to Cardonald and that consistency between Westminster and Scottish Parliament boundaries was desirable.
15. Councillor Andy Steel (Johnstone South and Elderslie) from Renfrewshire, also speaking in a personal capacity, highlighted concerns at the loss of local ties. The partitioning of the town of Johnstone was responsible for this and was impossible to justify. Exchanging one part of Johnstone town centre with Kilbarchan would have minimal effect on the size of the constituency. Alternatively, exchanging all of Johnstone together with Elderslie south of the railway line for Howwood, Kilbarchan and Lochwinnoch would have minimal effect on the size of the electorate. While far from ideal, this proposal would keep Johnstone together and maintain ties between the villages. It would keep Elderslie in a more appropriate position than joining it with Paisley. At a time when disillusionment with the political process was high, it was very important not to create a reason for people to switch off from it. Johnstone was big enough to have its own identity but not so big as to be split like a city could be. His proposals would strengthen local ties more than those from Boundaries Scotland and would encourage rather than weaken democratic participation locally.
16. Councillor Iain McMillan, leader of the Labour Group on Renfrewshire Council and representative for Johnstone South and Elderslie, was a Johnstone man who saw no sense in splitting the town between two constituencies. Local community groups were aghast at the proposal. Elderslie was within the ward of Johnstone South and Kilbarchan. Howwood and Lochwinnoch lay within Johnstone North ward, which reflected the close and historic ties between the town and the villages. The proposal would increase

disillusionment and local voter apathy and was considered a bad idea by people in the area.

17. Councillor Chris Gilmour (Johnstone North, Kilbarchan, Howwood and Lochwinnoch) felt that communities should never be split where it could be avoided. Johnstone with its population of 19,000 was still a small town with a strong sense of local identity. Johnstone, Kilbarchan, Lochwinnoch, and Howwood had strong links to Elderslie and Paisley but remained part of Renfrewshire Council. The creation of a Central Renfrewshire constituency which ran along the main arterial transport routes could reflect this, combining both Johnstone wards with Paisley Northwest, Paisley East and Central, Paisley Northeast and Ralston wards. This would be a good fit which would reflect the historical links with Paisley. Four local community groups which he had attended expressed surprise at the proposals because they had nothing in common with Eaglesham which was far off. The counter-proposal would create a Central Renfrewshire constituency of approximately 61,000 electors.
  
18. Neil Bibby, Regional MSP for the West of Scotland, thanked Boundaries Scotland for all its work and expressed appreciation for its approach towards Inverclyde and Renfrewshire. The biggest local issue was the splitting of Johnstone between two constituencies which was opposed by everyone who had spoken so far at the Local Inquiry. No town or village in East Renfrewshire was to be split in terms of the proposals but both Johnstone and Paisley were to be divided. Smaller towns would be affected adversely by a split more than larger ones such as Paisley. Johnstone had never been split between two constituencies in any previous election. The town had much stronger links with Paisley and Renfrewshire than with East Renfrewshire which lay on the other side of the Gleniffer Braes. Johnstone should stay as one unit within a Renfrewshire-only seat. Mr Bibby supported the creation of a Renfrewshire North constituency broadly similar to the current one of Renfrewshire North and West, a Central Renfrewshire constituency and a Paisley North and Johnstone constituency. These counter-proposals would better reflect local ties and the strong transport and community links within the area. Paisley had been divided between two constituencies in the past. It would make much more sense for the southern part of Paisley with around 16,000 voters to be part of a seat with the East

Renfrewshire areas of Barrhead, Neilston and Newton Mearns which shared transport, community and hospital links than for Johnstone to be split. In answer to a question, Mr Bibby explained that under the counter-proposal Renfrewshire North would contain approximately 62,000 electors and Paisley South and East Renfrewshire approximately 64,000. Paisley was the largest town in Scotland and had previously been divided between two constituencies for both Westminster and Scottish Parliamentary elections.

19. Greg Cook of the Scottish Labour Party welcomed the provisional proposals of Boundaries Scotland. East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire along with the City of Glasgow had a combined theoretical entitlement to 12.32 constituencies which, rounded down to 12, was one less than at present. Linking Glasgow with East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire as the Commission had done was the best way to deal with the situation and at least one constituency would need to contain parts of Glasgow and parts of one of the other authorities. Greenock and Inverclyde should be coterminous with the Inverclyde local authority area. No objection was made to the proposal to include two wards from East Renfrewshire Council in a Glasgow Priesthill and Giffnock constituency. There were ties between the two areas which would make for a coherent constituency, including strong transport links and a reasonably well-defined boundary. Long-standing ties from the old Eastwood constituency would be broken but it was not accepted that it was better for a medium sized local authority to be divided between a major part as one, whole constituency with a smaller, minority section being part of another constituency, as some counter proposals suggested for East Renfrewshire. There may be equally valid arguments for a relatively even division between two parts of a council area as Boundaries Scotland had proposed, whereby East Renfrewshire would contribute around 45% of the electorate of Glasgow, Priesthill and Giffnock and about 60% of that of Renfrewshire South. When considering the suggestions that the shared seat should link Glasgow and Renfrewshire as was about to become the case for the next Westminster election and that Cardonald ward be included in Paisley and Renfrewshire North it should be remembered that Westminster constituencies had a higher electoral quota and did not include any electors aged under 18, so that the circumstances differed between Scottish and Westminster constituencies.



20. Councillor Doig's counter proposals deserved consideration by the Commission, subject to resolution of issues caused by the split it made in Newton Mearns and by the fact that inclusion of Newton Mearns South and Eaglesham in the Priesthill and Giffnock seat would require that the Glasgow part of the seat would have to move elsewhere, which would have knock on effects within Glasgow.
21. Objection was taken because the Renfrewshire South was unwieldy, had poor internal transport links and comprised disparate parts which straddled three different road and rail corridors. It would be practically impossible for residents from other areas to attend constituency events in Newton Mearns by public transport in what was a relatively small unit. The proposal also broke ties by dividing Johnstone.
22. The proposed Renfrewshire West constituency was awkward because it separated Renfrew from Erskine and Inchinnan and because it divided the town of Johnstone and included one ward from Paisley which contained part of the town centre. The small electorate within the current Paisley constituency was not viable and Paisley had been divided between two seats in the past. It was submitted that the Barrhead and Newton Mearns (North and South) wards of East Renfrewshire should be linked with the south of Paisley in a new constituency of Paisley South and East Renfrewshire which would have an electorate of 64,260. The remainder of Paisley would be joined with all of Johnstone and the neighbouring villages in a Paisley North and Johnstone constituency which would contain the centre and north east of Ralston, both Johnstone wards, the north west wards in Paisley and two other Paisley polling districts, SP 17 (Paisley South East) and SP 18 (Paisley South West). This would have an electorate of 61,041. The wards in Renfrew North, Renfrew South, Houston, Crosslea and Linwood, Bishopton, Bridge of Weir and Langbank and Erskine and Inchinnan would comprise a Renfrewshire North and West constituency with an electorate of 62,211. These counter proposals would better reflect local ties and traditions and would not split Johnstone.

23. Mark Conaghan, Head of Corporate Governance and Deputy Returning Officer at Renfrewshire Council, spoke next. The Council was not submitting any alternative proposals formally but the unanimous view of its elected members was not to support the way in which the Commission's proposals divided up the Renfrewshire Council area. It was difficult to understand why the Commission had chosen to group Glasgow City Council with Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde. Local ties between Glasgow City Council and East and West Dunbartonshire and North and South Lanarkshire clearly existed but seemed not to have been considered. For example, South Lanarkshire Council's boundary lay within the territorial jurisdiction of Glasgow Sheriff Court. The Commission had sought to make the numbers work but had undermined the fundamental rules it was required to apply. That approach had led to illogical proposals, particularly with regard to Renfrewshire South.
24. With regard to local government boundaries, small parts of Inverclyde and East Renfrewshire were within a Renfrewshire constituency at present but there was no interaction between East Renfrewshire and Glasgow. The proposals contained a seat which straddled Glasgow, and East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire and moved parts of Renfrewshire into an Inverclyde constituency. The proposals made cross-boundary issues worse than at present and therefore did not meet the terms of Rule 1, being driven by quota concerns.
25. Turning to Rule 2, Glasgow's electoral quota issues appeared to be driving the proposed changes which were designed to bring seats in the Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and East Renfrewshire areas closer to the quota when at present they were above the quota. While Inverclyde's population was static, Renfrewshire's had grown and East Renfrewshire's was growing. Parts of East Renfrewshire were being moved into Glasgow to boost the city's numbers.
26. The Commission had failed to observe Rules 3 and 4. It could easily have grouped Glasgow with other west of Scotland council areas which surrounded it rather than Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde. This approach had tied its hands. By

excluding the possibility of looking at the wider areas which bounded the three councils the Commission had avoided considering simpler and more logical solutions.

27. Looking at the proposed seats, the largest ward on Paisley Council – ward 4, Paisley North West, which contains the Royal Alexandria Hospital – was to be excluded from the new Paisley and Renfrew constituency. This arrangement was at odds with special geographical considerations and with the maintenance of local ties and was a surprising one. Its electorate of almost 64,000 was well above the quota.
28. Renfrewshire West, at 61,690, was also well above the quota. Most of Johnstone was included although a large part of the west of the town was to be included in the proposed Renfrewshire South constituency, splitting its ward 8, which showed that little consideration had been given to retaining local ties in Johnstone, again driven by the numbers.
29. Renfrewshire South, at 61,996 electors, was also well above quota. It had always contained wards 1 and 2 from East Renfrewshire. There was an understandable geographical link between Barrhead and Paisley and housing developments which would extend Paisley to its boundary with Barrhead were proposed. Neilston had a connection with Barrhead and local people absolutely understood the existing boundaries and their justification. The proposals to extend the new constituency from Lochwinnoch to Newton Mearns and Eaglesham had little regard to local areas and ties, or the inconvenience caused by the alteration of the existing boundaries. There was no local connection between Newton Mearns and any western part of Renfrewshire, which was sparsely populated and agricultural. A car journey from Eaglesham to Lochwinnoch would cross through the boundaries of five other proposed constituencies. At close of polling, ballot boxes would have to make a similar journey from Lochwinnoch to the Returning Officer for East Renfrewshire. Public transport from one end of the constituency to the other needs a trip into Glasgow and back out again.

30. It was suggested to Mr Conaghan that Stirling was another council area which adjoined Glasgow and he repeated that the Commission had tied its hands by excluding logical considerations.

31. Mr Conaghan's contribution concluded the afternoon session.

### **Submissions made at the Local Inquiry – evening session (Newton Mearns)**

32. The first speaker at the evening session was Gerry Mahon, who spoke on behalf of East Renfrewshire Council. It was recognised that the population of East Renfrewshire was too big to constitute one constituency but too small to form two, so that it would have to overlap with an adjacent local authority. The pre-existing constituency of Eastwood met all relevant criteria but would be carved into two, neither of which met the criteria to the same degree. In the west of Scotland, Glasgow City as the predominant population centre, formed the hub of an expanding wheel. At the edge of the city neighbouring authorities were providing the balancing numbers to make up the electoral quota, apparently without due regard being paid to the merits of the existing situation. Options preferable to the Commission's proposals existed which might better serve the local electorate, MSPs and the election process by retaining an Eastwood constituency with a variation of the proposed Renfrewshire South. The proposed boundaries had been driven by numbers to the detriment of consideration of local authority areas, the maintenance of local ties, geographical considerations, and inconvenience caused by the alteration of existing arrangements. The proposed constituencies were not convenient or practical, having no easily identifiable boundaries, and paid no regard to established historical, cultural, social or geographical local ties. East Renfrewshire Council's position was that the Eastwood constituency should be maintained and that Leven Valley, or part of it, should be included in a revised Renfrewshire South. The present Eastwood constituency had an electorate of 58,258, approximately 93% of the electoral quota, which was an acceptable variation and below some 28 other proposed constituencies. East Renfrewshire had the fourth highest projected population growth in Scotland, estimated at 6.4% between 2018 and 2028. Local schools were a huge draw for incoming movement and since the Scottish Parliamentary electorate included 16 year olds the local electorate would rise and continue to rise. For

Boundaries Scotland to ignore these projections would undermine the rationale underpinning their own proposals. Eastwood was a long established constituency with recognised boundaries and public awareness. The local administration of the election process was a well-rehearsed machine with established venues served by public transport. Changes might reduce preparedness, understanding and participation in elections. There were strong historical ties among the communities within East Renfrewshire, easily accessible to each other with convenient travel links. Its retention reflected a better option than what is proposed.

33. An alternative would be to combine four existing council wards with Neilston which would create a constituency with 60,536 electors which would be above the electoral quota but within an acceptable range, being smaller than the two proposed constituencies affecting the East Renfrewshire Council area. While not the Council's preferred option, this alternative would be better than Boundaries Scotland's proposals which created two constituencies sitting above the electoral quota even before population growth was considered. There were no established or historical links across the Glasgow/East Renfrewshire boundary between the communities within the proposed Glasgow Priesthill and Giffnock constituency. The East Renfrewshire portion would lose its existing links to Newton Mearns and Eaglesham. The proposed constituency straddled two local authority areas. Although physically close, public transport channels demonstrated a lack of social connection between the communities; for example, travel from Busby to Priesthill by public transport took approximately one hour.

34. Turning to Renfrewshire South, the Council was generally supportive of such a constituency but considered that the Commission's proposals were impractical and inefficient because they linked together areas with no cultural, historical or geographical connections. It would be more appropriate to link up areas in and around Paisley. The proposed constituency had minimal transport links. There was no main road route from one end to another. It would take an estimated time of two to three hours to go from one end to another by public transport. All that would have an impact for representatives' local surgeries. Most of the population lived within East Renfrewshire but most of the land

mass was in Renfrewshire. Returning Officer duties would fall upon East Renfrewshire officers who used premises at the eastern end of the local authority area to conduct the count. These arrangements would have to be changed because of the travel limitations in the new constituency to keep the count efficient. The quickest road routes between parts of the proposed constituency required driving out of the constituency and back into it again.

35. East Renfrewshire Council did not believe that Boundaries Scotland's proposals met the review criteria.

36. Jackson Carlaw, MSP for Eastwood, said that the area was unusual by having no physical town centre but was steeped in history. In more recent times it had been represented by various prominent MPs and MSPs. It had extraordinarily high levels of voter turnout and democratic participation, the equal of almost anywhere in the UK and usually in the top two or three in Scotland. It had the highest turnout anywhere in the UK at the 2011 referendum on proportional representation and over 90% at the 2014 referendum on Scottish Independence. This democratic architecture was part of what made the Eastwood constituency an entity which people recognised and wished to support. Mr Carlaw endorsed the views which had been expressed on behalf of East Renfrewshire Council, views which were shared across all political parties. He presented a range of anecdotal examples demonstrating the absence of ties and links between the communities in East Renfrewshire and those in Priesthill, Howwood, Johnstone and Paisley. Having lived within Eastwood his whole life, Mr Carlaw knew the area and its people well and they knew him as someone who promoted the interests of the area in the Scottish Parliament. In both of the proposed constituencies the Eastwood representation would be in the minority within a much larger seat and would lose its distinctive voice in the Scottish Parliament. For the MSP, movement around the constituency would take hours rather than minutes. 50-60% of Scotland's Jewish community lived within East Renfrewshire and the proposals would divide some of them from the amalgamated, single synagogue (located in Newton Mearns). At present the community lived and worshipped together in a single constituency represented by a single voice to speak and act on their behalf.

Eastwood was acceptably close to the electoral quota and closer than the proposed Glasgow Priesthill and Giffnock constituency would be. Strangely the headquarters of East Renfrewshire Council would likely be within a Glasgow Scottish Parliament region. Mr Carlaw explained that he would be likely to retire at the next election so that his position was not determined by self-interest but by a desire to see the best representation for Eastwood. The people of Eastwood believed they were part of something distinct from Glasgow, Paisley or Renfrew and wished their separate entity to continue.

37. Jim Swift, a member of the public, said that Eastwood was a collection of small communities which had important cultural ties. Three of its schools – Calderwood Lodge, which served the Jewish community, Isobel Mair, for children with special needs, and St Ninian’s RC High School, were constituency-wide schools. Local relations were built on social, cultural and educational organisations. The constituency contained very large athletics and children’s football clubs, all of which were part of something bigger. The reformed synagogue was in Newton Mearns and the traditional synagogue was in Giffnock which would be in different constituencies. Many people raised in Eastwood returned to bring their own children up in the area. There were many religious groups in Eastwood. It was a large community where people found their social, cultural and educational opportunities. Mr Swift could cycle round Eastwood with ease but a run to Lochwinnoch was a very different exercise. The distance across the constituency would make the representative’s job much harder. It would be easier for one person to represent all the various schools and the redevelopment of Eastwood Theatre and Leisure Centre might be less advantageous to the people of Newton Mearns if representation changed.

38. Alison McGowan, the Chair of Thornliebank Community Council, had extensive family and personal connections with, and knowledge of, local industry and charitable organisations, some of which were funded through East Renfrewshire Council. Thornliebank, with a local population of about 4,000, had 15,000 patients registered at the local health centre. People living in Giffnock could not register there but others from Nitshill or as far afield as Crookston could. Glasgow City Council offered health facilities – a hospital at home service and community linked practitioners – which East

Renfrewshire Council did not. The Thornliebank health centre attracted a horrific level of traffic. Thornliebank Primary School contained more Glasgow pupils via placing requests than those from Thornliebank and East Renfrewshire. Thornliebank was a stagnant community with no opportunity for expansion or development. It would contain the most social housing of all the Eastwood areas moving into the new constituency. An Eastwood resident would be unlikely to seek an MSP's support for a placing request to a Glasgow school or to access social housing elsewhere. A cross-boundary MSP would strengthen links to Glasgow and put additional pressures on Thornliebank's stretched housing, education and health services. It was classed as an area of deprivation. Serious poverty would be brought into the new constituency from Glasgow. When its MSP was lobbying for investment from the Scottish Parliament, funding for Eastwood projects would be lost, sidelined by the sheer level of need in the Glasgow areas of the new constituency. Thornliebank residents lived in Eastwood and East Renfrewshire and strongly wanted to remain part of that community.

39. Councillor Saqib Ahmed represented Glasgow City Council's Greater Pollok ward including Priesthill, Nitshill, Crookston and Deaconsbank. He believed that the proposed constituency covering Priesthill and Giffnock would be good for democracy and improve representation for people who were not very well off. East Renfrewshire was too big for one constituency but too small for two. The boundaries for the Scottish Parliament would not affect schools, health boards, community councils or council boundaries; or travel times between places. Trains and buses were well connected. People could regularly commute to Glasgow. He travelled from Pollok to the south side of Glasgow to worship. It would not be difficult to go from one part of East Renfrewshire to another which was not in the same constituency. He supported the proposals. In answer to a question, Councillor Ahmed said that travel between the diverse communities of Priesthill and Giffnock was very easy by public transport. The boundary proposals were well balanced.
40. Suzanne Wildman, a member of the public, questioned how effectively an MSP could represent a constituency if they had to deal with two local authorities on any issues. Councillor Ahmed replied that some Members currently represented constituencies which



covered parts of Glasgow City Council's area and that of South Lanarkshire. It worked and there would not be an issue. Regional list MSPs represented areas containing more than one local authority without hesitation or hindrance. Several people questioned Councillor Ahmed's statements regarding public transport routes between parts of the proposed constituency. Councillor Ahmed confirmed that he was speaking in a personal capacity and was not expressing the views of Glasgow City Council.

41. Baillie Rashid Hussain, also a member of Glasgow City Council, did not agree with the views of Councillor Ahmed. There were no local ties or any real connections between the communities in Priesthill and Giffnock. Transport links ran in and out of Glasgow, not across these areas and in Pollok were restricted after 6pm. Getting to a hospital from Pollok by public transport was a nightmare. The only real connection between the areas was the M77 corridor. He supported the views of East Renfrewshire Council. His views were his own he was not speaking for Glasgow City Council.

42. Councillor Stephen Curran represented the Newlands/Auldburn ward of Glasgow City Council which lay to the north of the proposed Priesthill and Giffnock boundary. The importance of communities should be recognised. Community Council boundaries were based on real communities and were more significant than constituency or regional Parliamentary boundaries. The history of Eastwood was well known and Eastwood and Merrylee were names of areas in Glasgow and East Renfrewshire. Arden, Carnwadric, Kennishead and Regents Park and his own ward shared the Thornliebank postcode – G46. There were transport links by bus and rail around the proposed new constituency. It was probably more troublesome for the MSP to get around it than for his constituents. The current East Renfrewshire, Eastwood and Glasgow Cathcart constituencies had no easily identifiable boundaries and there was more of a coterminous community around Thornliebank.

43. An elected representative fundamentally represented everyone in his constituency or ward regardless of where they lived or who they had voted for, including minorities. He had detailed knowledge of local faith communities which were already active across the

somewhat artificial representative boundaries, recognising real communities in the way that faith communities engaged. He had brought his own children into Eastwood for swimming lessons so the idea of the distinctiveness of the communities did not chime with his own experience. People saw the closeness between a lot of these communities which shared names, interests, and transport connections. Lines on a map were important for representatives but not for those looking for support and individuals and constituents.

44. In answer to a question from Suzanne Wildman, Mr Curran explained that he was relaxed about the proposals which would not put electors in his area at any disadvantage by linking them to Eastwood. Changes had to be made because of the electoral map and quota.
45. Councillor Owen O'Donnell, the Leader of East Renfrewshire Council, indicated that the presentation made on behalf of the Council had the full support of all members. Objection to the proposals was unanimous regardless of political persuasion.
46. Speakers from the floor criticised Boundaries Scotland for the lack of publicity about the review and in particular for the Local Inquiry meeting itself. As Chair of the meeting I indicated that it had been publicised in newspapers and on social media and suggested that they might write to Boundaries Scotland for future reference.
47. Steven Quinn, Chief Executive of East Renfrewshire Council, recognised that Boundaries Scotland could not take account of projected population growth and decline in the present review but suggested that might be revisited for future reviews. While the area was too big for one constituency but too small for two, the proposals split up the East Renfrewshire Council area in its entirety between Glasgow and Renfrewshire. An East Renfrewshire constituency really was in the best interests of its communities.
48. As an estate agent Suzanne Wildman indicated that people aspired to live in East Renfrewshire and Eastwood because of the local schools and social aspects.

49. Gordon Wallace-Brown, a member of the public, suggested that people from Priesthill would probably shop in Silverburn rather than Giffnock and public transport links supported that idea. Change should be minimal and there was in reality no commonality between Priesthill and Giffnock. Councillor Ahmed replied that he had been suggesting that the two communities could combine brilliantly to elect a representative who would democratically serve both.
50. Councillor Curran and local resident Mairi Beers provided detailed information about the number 374 and 38 bus routes around the area and reiterated the point that the local MSP should go to meet his constituents rather than the other way round. Several speakers commented on local transport policy to reduce car travel and increase cycle lanes, which did not sit easily with increasing the need to drive round the constituency, which concluded the evening session.

### **Summary of the Issues**

51. With regard to all of the proposals criticism has been made of the size and shape of the new constituencies which, it is suggested, would lead to difficulties over communication between constituents and their MSP. Modern communications systems such as email, Facebook and other electronic social media ought to make this much less of an issue than it might have been in the past, although it must be recognised that many people, especially the elderly, may have little or no access to such facilities. It is to be expected that a conscientious MSP would arrange local surgeries so as to be available to people in all parts of their constituency. The point was well-made that an MSP should make him or herself available to everyone they represent.
52. With regard to the proposals to divide the town of Johnstone between two constituencies has clearly provoked strong feeling locally. The suggestion that it might be more logical to divide a large town such as Paisley, which has more wards within it, rather than a small one the size of Johnstone, is, I respectfully suggest, worthy of consideration although any such division will give rise to local concerns even where there may be a precedent for it.

53. Mr Cook and Councillor Doig presented thoughtful and detailed counter proposals which are worthy of consideration as are the alternative suggestions made by Mr Mahon on behalf of East Renfrewshire Council which were designed to mitigate the strong objections to the Commission's proposals unanimously expressed by the members of the Council.
54. The counter-proposals supported and modified by Councillor Andy Doig (*supra*, paragraphs 7-12) with regard to Renfrewshire preserved the integrity of Johnstone and parts of Paisley but created three large constituencies. Although all three would be within 10% of the electoral quota, the proposed Renfrewshire South and East constituency would be almost exactly that percentage above it which indicates that it might not be a viable solution in the longer term. His suggestions were, as he conceded, incomplete because they had failed to allocate one East Renfrewshire ward into the scheme.
55. Boundaries Scotland is bound to follow the present Rules which restrict it from taking into account planned developments and require it to calculate the electoral quota from the 2022 electorate. While some speakers mentioned local plans and likely population increases in specific areas, the Commission may not take those factors into consideration for the purposes of the present review.
56. With regard to the proposals in relation to Eastwood and the surrounding area, the unanimous opposition expressed by East Renfrewshire Council members, regardless of their political affiliation, reflects the strength of local feeling in Eastwood, as does the very high number of written responses received by the Commission. This appeared to be echoed by the views expressed by individuals who spoke from the floor at the Local Inquiry, including the sitting MSP and others who had lived in the area for all or most of their lives.
57. Three members of Glasgow City Council spoke, each of whom represented communities living at or close to the boundary between Glasgow and East Renfrewshire. Councillor Ahmed was in favour of the proposal put forward by Boundaries Scotland; Bailie Hussain opposed; and Councillor Curran saw no disadvantage for his electors. These mixed views make it difficult to gauge the strength of feeling on the Glasgow side of the boundary.

58. There are serious and contentious issues to be considered by Boundaries Scotland in relation to Glasgow City, Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde on account of population shifts which show decline in some areas and significant increases in others. The best solution in relation to each would appear to be that which would be the least disruptive of the status quo in the light of strong local feelings. I do not consider that it would be appropriate for me to make recommendations to the Commission on the basis of the information available to me and in view of the conflicting presentations which were made. I commend each of the proposals and counter-proposals summarised above to Boundaries Scotland for their consideration and the points raised within paragraphs 51 to 57 above are presented with the intention of offering assistance to the Commission as it seeks to exercise its statutory discretion to determine practical solutions in accordance with Rules 1-4.

Reported by

Sean F Murphy KC

11 February 2024

## **Appendix**

List of those who gave evidence at the Local Enquiry hearings (in order of presentation)

### **Afternoon Session:**

Councillor Andy Doig, Renfrewshire Council

Thomas Wallace, Johnstone Community Council

Councillor Janis McDonald, Renfrewshire Council

Andy Steel, Renfrewshire Council

Councillor Iain McMillan, Renfrewshire Council

Councillor Chris Gilmour, Renfrewshire Council

Neil Bibby, MSP for West Scotland

Greg Cook, Scottish Labour Party

Mark Conaghan, Head of Corporate Governance and Deputy Returning Officer, Renfrewshire Council

### **Evening Session:**

Gerry Mahon, East Renfrewshire Council

Jackson Carlaw, MSP for Eastwood

Jim Swift, a member of the public

Alison McGowan, Chair of Thornliebank Community Council

Councillor Saqib Ahmed, Glasgow City Council

Suzanne Wildman, a member of the public

Baillie Rashid Hussain, Glasgow City Council

Councillor Steven Curran, Glasgow City Council

Councillor Owen O'Donnell, Leader of East Renfrewshire Council

Steven Quinn, Chief Executive, East Renfrewshire Council

Gordon Wallace-Brown, a member of the public

Mairi Beers, a member of the public