

**SCOTLAND ACT 1998 as amended by  
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT (CONSTITUENCIES) ACT 2004**

**REPORT**

**By**

**Sheriff Principal S F Murphy**

**In respect of a Local Inquiry into Boundaries Scotland's Further Proposals for the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald and Renfrewshire West constituencies and the Provisional Proposals for the Glasgow and West Scotland regions held at the Courtyard by Marriott Hotel by Glasgow Airport on 28 November 2024 .**

**Background**

1. Boundaries Scotland is an independent statutory Commission which is obliged under Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998, as amended, to review the boundaries of mainland electoral constituencies and the regions 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 constituency boundaries:
  - Rule 1 – So far as is practicable, 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 practicable, 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 inconveniences 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.
5. For regions, the Commission must take into account two rules. Rule 1 is that a constituency must fit wholly within a region. Rule 2 is that the regional electorate of a region must be as near the regional electorate of each of the other regions as is practicable, having regard (where appropriate) to special geographic considerations
6. Boundaries Scotland 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

Commission arises as a result of the need to take account of the movement of electors within Scotland.

7. 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. Following previous consultations various revisions were made in relation to constituencies and the Further Proposals for constituencies and Provisional Proposals for regions were consulted on in September 2024.
8. Renfrewshire Council objected to the proposed Glasgow and West Scotland regions and the proposed Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald; and Renfrewshire West constituencies as did some members of the general public.

### **Summary of the Proposals**

9. Boundaries Scotland's previous proposals for constituencies placed both Johnstone and Renfrew in single constituencies which were revised in order to resemble the previous boundaries in Renfrewshire more closely. An Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency was created which included part of a ward from Glasgow Govan.
10. The Provisional Proposals for regions placed the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency within Glasgow Region, although most of its area lies within Renfrewshire. Since the last review of Scottish Parliament boundaries Renfrewshire has had a significant growth in its population and electorate but Glasgow has not. The Commission must consider changes to the electorate across the whole of Scotland so that constituency and

regional boundaries may require to be altered so as to balance out the overall position in order to ensure that all constituencies and regions across Scotland are of a broadly similar electoral size, having regard to the electoral quota.

### **Submissions made at the Local Inquiry – afternoon session**

11. Bruce McFarlane spoke on behalf of Natalie Don-Innes, MSP, to welcome the inclusion of Bishopton within the constituency of Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald. He suggested that Langbank should be included in that constituency because of its close ties to Bishopton and Erskine. However, no part of Glasgow should be included in a Renfrewshire seat as it was preferable that constituencies should be within one local authority area according to the guidance. With regard to local ties and geographical considerations, the M8 motorway separated Cardonald from Renfrew and there were no local transport routes between Cardonald and Erskine. The proposal was not a prudent way to reduce the number of Glasgow constituencies or to seek an evenly-distributed amount of electors. The Commission had not apparently considered more appropriate areas surrounding Glasgow which had closer links and connections to the city. Housebuilding was scheduled to continue in Bishopton until 2032 so that if Cardonald were to be excluded, the number of electors in what remained would be likely to be below the electoral quota only for a short period of time. The current proposals exchanged some villages in the current Renfrewshire North and West constituency for part of Glasgow. If there was no alternative the portion of Cardonald included in the new seat should be reduced and the constituency should be renamed Renfrewshire North and Cardonald.
  
12. The proposal to include Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald within Glasgow Region was strongly opposed. It was predominantly a Renfrewshire seat. Inverclyde, Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire Councils worked closely together through Renfrewshire's Valuation Joint Board and Civil Contingencies Board as a region for those purposes. Renfrew, a Royal Burgh, was distinct from Glasgow, while Erskine and Bishopton lay several miles away from the city, separated by open countryside. The area had a Paisley

postcode. Local people did not consider themselves as being from Glasgow. Voter confusion would follow. Wards 2 and 11 in Renfrewshire would each be split between two different regions, Glasgow and West Scotland. The constituencies of Dumbarton, Clydebank and Milngavie and Strathkelvin and Bearsden would be physically separated from the rest of the West Scotland Region. There were much more suitable alternatives which could provide an additional constituency to the Glasgow Region, such as Eastwood which had a Glasgow postcode and closer links to the city of Glasgow than Erskine and Renfrew. Placing the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency in the West Scotland region would give it a total electorate less than that of South Scotland. The remaining Glasgow Region would still have a fairly large electorate, albeit higher only than the Highlands.

13. Mark Conaghan, Head of Corporate Governance at Renfrewshire Council, adopted the detailed written submissions which had been put forward by the Council, a response which was shared by Alan Russell who was both the Returning Officer for the Renfrewshire Council area and the Regional Returning Officer for the West Scotland Region at the last Scottish Parliamentary election. The Commission's proposals were the result of its flawed approach which had previously been criticised by the Council. The constituency design approach grouped Renfrewshire with East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and Glasgow City Councils, then determined that the group required to lose one seat, based on a logic that had no basis in legislation or the rules governing the review. It also ignored the impact on the regional review. From that starting point the Commission had effectively predetermined the outcome of the review, that a seat must be lost from the group, without having regard to the rules, such as geographical considerations (Rule 3) or local ties (Rule 4). This approach risked illogical results and was open to challenge. Constituencies seemed to have been designed without regard to local ties. Only electors within the seats covered by the four councils were at risk of moving their regional area while wholly excluding electors elsewhere in the West Scotland region. The council-grouping approach had fettered the Commission's discretion. It had closed its mind to considering other constituency boundaries neighbouring Glasgow to see whether changes to those boundaries might have maintained Glasgow Region without

the inclusion of a seat whose geography and electorate lay almost entirely outwith Glasgow. It had failed to consider whether one of those other constituencies would be more appropriate for inclusion in the Glasgow Region.

14. Turning to individual constituencies, the Council had no objection to the inclusion of Neilston within the Renfrewshire West seat or to the removal of Bishopton from that seat to Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald, which would assist in balancing out the electoral quota. However, Langbank's significant local ties with Bishopton would be broken. The Council did not support the removal of part of Ward 8 from this constituency to Paisley as it split a council ward, had not been consulted on previously and would lead to voter confusion. The basis of that change was not clear.
15. With regard to the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald seat, the Council did not consider that any part of a Glasgow constituency needed to be included in a Renfrewshire area one, given the current electorate numbers in Renfrewshire. Cardonald could be removed with other alterations being made across the other two Renfrewshire constituencies to create a seat of Renfrewshire North. However, if only the parts of Cardonald which currently lay within the Paisley and Renfrewshire North UK Parliamentary constituency were included in an Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency, there would be no need to create a new boundary or cause further voter confusion. The electoral number of the seat under the Commission's proposal was 62,482, which was well in excess of the quota. The Council's proposal would reduce this by approximately 4,000 electors, bringing it closer to the quota.
16. Boundaries Scotland is required to prepare proposals based on the 2022 electoral roll. Bishopton included the largest growth area in Renfrewshire at Dargavel village. Since 2022 the electorate in that area was estimated to have grown by about fifteen hundred voters which meant that the proposed constituency would currently be over 64,300, around 7.5% above the electoral quota. Coupled with development in the Renfrew area, it was likely that this constituency would have an electorate well in excess of 70,000 by the time of the next Scottish Parliamentary review. The logic of these considerations was that

it would be better to design the constituency to start below the current electoral quota rather than some 3,500 above it. This consideration was a further reason why the additional area of Cardonald should be removed from the proposed constituency. There were no real geographical or local ties between Cardonald and Renfrew or Renfrewshire other than the inclusion of part of it within the Westminster constituency.

17. There was no reason to include part of Ward 4 within this constituency. It contained only seven voters. The only reason for its inclusion could be that it would place Glasgow Airport within the seat. This provided no logical justification for splitting the ward.
18. Turning to the regional proposals, the Council could not accept any suggestion that any Renfrewshire constituency should fall within the Glasgow Region. The role of List MSPs was to represent a region with understandable geographical boundaries containing electorates with local ties, common interests and connections. A cursory examination of the maps of the proposed West Scotland and Glasgow Regions showed this was not the case. There was no reasonable connection between Bishopton and Erskine and Glasgow and no physical or transport links. The proposal created a region of two parts. In the existing West Scotland region the areas north and south of the River Clyde were connected by the Erskine Bridge and the Renfrew Ferry (and soon also by the new Renfrew Bridge) but all of these connections lay within the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency and so would be in the Glasgow Region. The constituency was pivotal to the geography of the West Scotland Region: it was the one seat which could not be removed from it because it linked the areas north and south of the Clyde.
19. Had the Commission considered separately each constituency boundary within Glasgow, rather than grouping councils together, it would have been highly likely that each constituency in the Glasgow area would have had most of their geographical area in Glasgow, a majority of their electorate living within the Glasgow City Council area and an overall electorate which would have sustained the Glasgow region. The current proposals saw a West Scotland region 30,000 to 40,000 electors smaller than Glasgow region; moving Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald back into West Scotland pivoted things the other way. It would have been possible to take small parts of other neighbouring

constituencies around Glasgow to reach an appropriate electorate for Glasgow region. For example, parts of Clydebank were adjacent to Yoker and parts of Bearsden were adjacent to Drumchapel. The knock-on effects for the seats just outside Glasgow would have been small but some degree of local ties would still have been maintained.

20. The Commission's approach was fundamentally flawed. Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald would be part of Glasgow region despite the vast majority of its geography and two-thirds of its electorate being in Renfrewshire. In some Council wards voters would find themselves in two different regions. The catchment areas of Park Mains High School (Ward 11) and Trinity High School (Ward 2) would fall into two separate regions. MSP interest in the two schools would extend to 14 MSPs. The proposals were illogical and unreasonable which was further illustrated by the position of the Returning Officer for Renfrewshire. Presently he was responsible for three constituencies and was also the Regional Returning Officer for West Scotland. He would be expected to retain these roles. Under the proposals all of the West Scotland Returning Officers would report to him but he, the Regional Returning Officer for Renfrewshire, would in turn report in relation to one constituency to the Regional Returning Officer for Glasgow.
21. The Commission had to consider which other of the proposed constituencies bordering on Glasgow would be best suited for inclusion within Glasgow Region. Eastwood constituency contained one Council area. Most of its population lived in areas such as Thornliebank, Clarkston, Busby and Newton Mearns, which were reasonably regarded as suburbs of Glasgow and were often described as part of Greater Glasgow, having close transport and infrastructure links with the city. Similar observations applied to Clydebank, Milngavie, Bearsden, Bishopbriggs and Kirkintilloch. These areas were more suited to inclusion within Glasgow region than Bishopton, Erskine and Renfrew. They would not divide the north from the south of West Scotland region.
22. The Commission had to give serious consideration to these comments. A number of elected members had approached Mr Conaghan as the Council's Chief Legal Officer to raise the issue of judicial review if the current proposals were to be adopted. This reflected the strength of feeling among local people and their representatives.



23. Alex Brown, speaking on behalf of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, expressed contentment with the revised constituency proposals. Recognising that the downward trend in Glasgow's electorate required that the city be grouped with another Council area, he pointed to the existing connections with Renfrewshire Council for UK Parliamentary constituency purposes. Boundaries Scotland's proposals would address the issues logically. He disagreed with the counter proposal to include Eastwood with Glasgow. There had been no previous link between Eastwood and the city. This would split the East Renfrewshire Council area between two Scottish Parliamentary regions. It was a much smaller local authority than Renfrewshire. Logically such a split was more appropriate for a larger council area, such as South Lanarkshire which was partly within Glasgow region at present. Renfrewshire Council's counter-proposal's submission was inconsistent as it criticised splitting wards in Renfrewshire but suggested doing so in East Renfrewshire. During the previous consultation round in 2023 there had been significant local opposition to the division of East Renfrewshire and any link with Glasgow region which was recognised under the current, revised proposals. There had been no similar response in Renfrewshire to the recent proposals. Jackson Carlaw, the sitting MSP for Eastwood, had written to Boundaries Scotland recently to support the West Scotland region proposals and the retention of Eastwood in that region.
24. Mr Conaghan pointed out that the revised constituency proposals in relation to Neilston arose from submissions made by local people after the previous consultation round and Mr Brown replied that he would be happy to comment further in writing.
25. Neil Bibby, MSP for the West Scotland region, thanked the Boundaries Scotland for their labours and in particular for the revisions made following the previous consultation exercise to the constituency arrangements for Johnstone, Neilston, and Bishopton. He believed there was a sense in Renfrewshire that some detrimental, knock-on consequences had followed from the addressing of concerns over East Renfrewshire. David Woodrow of Bishopton Community Council had written in the press that day to describe the positioning of Bishopton within Glasgow Region as "bizarre".

26. Mr Bibby supported and commended to the Commission the submissions advanced by Renfrewshire Council. In particular a new Renfrewshire North seat could be created but including only the parts of Cardonald which presently formed part of the current UK Parliamentary constituency. Following the recent UK election he had detected a great deal of voter confusion, which had been across party lines. It was important to take account of the likely effect of housing development in the Dargavel area. While Boundaries Scotland was required to look at the 2022 electorate, it would be remiss to go over the quota in that area as the starting position.
27. He was more concerned over the inclusion of the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency within the Glasgow region. Renfrew had been a historic burgh and county town, distinct and separate from Glasgow, for centuries. Placing the town of Renfrew in a different region from the rest of Renfrewshire was ridiculous and broke significant and historical ties. The shape of the proposed region was odd. It did not make sense from either the Glasgow or the West of Scotland perspective. The West Scotland region spanned north and south of the River Clyde but the direct link at the Erskine Bridge would be in the Glasgow region. He agreed with Mr Conaghan's submissions in that respect. The proposals split the West Scotland region into two parts which were not linked to each other. The Renfrewshire areas all had Paisley postcodes while every other seat in the West Scotland region bordering Glasgow had a Glasgow postcode. This demonstrated their historical ties and differences. Keeping all of Renfrewshire together in the West Scotland region took account of historical community ties according to Rule 4 and geographical considerations according to Rule 3, as well as keeping local authority boundaries together.
28. Councillor Kevin Montgomery, Secretary of the Labour Group in Renfrewshire Council, explained that although his Group were the principal political opposition within the Council they very much supported the Council's position and its counter-proposals. This showed the widespread concern in the local community and the cross-party consensus across Renfrewshire. From working on behalf of Alison Taylor, MP, on Parliamentary business across local authority boundaries, he was aware of a fair degree of voter confusion. Boundaries Scotland needed to be very careful about that to maintain public

confidence in the system. Councillor Sam Mullin in Erskine had received considerable correspondence from local voters and groups unable to make sense of the constituency arrangements and the seat going into Glasgow region. The position of Cardonald in the present UK Parliamentary seat had its own problems and any further movement into Glasgow would create much more voter confusion.

29. The boundary to a Renfrewshire North seat could be scaled back by including Langbank and taking cognisance of the development of Dargavel which was seeing a large population increase. Placing Bishopton, Erskine and Langbank into Glasgow Region would be bad for administration and was firmly opposed. The idea of Renfrew not being in the same region as Renfrewshire would not command public confidence. The boundary between Renfrew and Glasgow was centuries old. Other, less radical, moves could work. Using smaller pieces from suburban Councils around Glasgow would be much easier for the public to understand. The proposals move parts of Renfrewshire which are quite far from Glasgow, have very poor public transport links to the city and no traditional community ties with it. Boundaries Scotland should listen to the concerns of the people of Renfrewshire as they had done previously in other places such as Eastwood.
30. Gerry Mahon, the Chief Legal Officer for East Renfrewshire Council, indicated that the Council's position with regard to Renfrewshire constituencies forming part of Glasgow region was a neutral one as it was not considered appropriate to offer a view on the merits of something outwith East Renfrewshire. However, the counter proposal by Renfrewshire Council to include Eastwood on the Glasgow list was strongly opposed and was logically flawed. The suggestion that Eastwood was reasonably regarded as a Glasgow suburb neglected and misrepresented the strongly held views of local residents of their distinct local identity. The strength of their feeling was clear at the previous inquiry in late 2023. Eastwood residents do not see themselves as part of Glasgow, a view vigorously endorsed by local politicians from all parties. The significance of local feeling was reflected in Boundaries Scotland's earlier decision to retain the position of the Eastwood constituency after the last consultation round.

31. Under the counterproposal Ward 2 of East Renfrewshire would be split between regions and the school catchment area of Eastwood High School would give rise to the involvement of 15 MSPs. Matters regarded as “wholly illogical and unreasonable” in Renfrewshire would be created in Eastwood. The problematic issues would not be solved, merely shifted elsewhere. If Renfrewshire did not withdraw its counter proposal, Boundaries Scotland was urged not to see Eastwood as a viable alternative to form part of the Glasgow region.
  
32. Hugh McMahon, a member of the public and a former Regional MEP for the West of Scotland, believed that the regional and constituency electoral system served Scotland well. A Ralston resident, he welcomed the incorporation of Renfrew’s name in the proposed new Renfrewshire seat because of Renfrew’s ancient historical importance. Its original sheriffs had become the Stewart kings. He appreciated the difficulty caused by the declining electorate in the Glasgow area but the Boundary Commission’s proposals had not taken account of the growing populations of Braehead and Dargavel. Renfrewshire should be kept as a separate entity from Glasgow. It would be wrong to put parts of Renfrewshire into the Glasgow region because of the very limited contact between them and Glasgow. Renfrewshire was the heartland of the West Regional seat which he had served in the European Parliament. Boundaries Scotland should keep Renfrewshire within the West of Scotland region.
  
33. Councillor Owen O’Donnell, the Leader of East Renfrewshire Council, and Ward Councillor for Newton Mearns North and Neilston, recognised that this was not East Renfrewshire’s fight but unfortunately they had been drawn in by Renfrewshire Council’s counter proposals. His Council agreed with Renfrewshire that it was illogical and unreasonable to split council wards between regions but the counter proposal would do exactly that in Mr O’Donnell’s Ward as well as splitting a school catchment area between two regions and involving up to 14 different MSPs. A solution which passed an unreasonable and wholly illogical problem to a neighbouring local authority was no solution at all. There had been no time to consult locally on the Renfrewshire counter-proposals but he was absolutely certain that both elected members and voters would

protest against those moves with the strength of feeling previously shown at the earlier consultation exercise.

### **Submissions made at the Inquiry – Evening Session**

34. The evening session was addressed by Paul O’Kane, MSP for West Scotland. He had formerly been the Councillor for Newton Mearns North and Neilston and the Deputy Leader of East Renfrewshire Council. He supported Boundaries Scotland’s proposals for the constituencies of Renfrewshire West and Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald. He welcomed the return of Neilston to the same constituency as the Lavern Valley. By arranging that the constituencies of Paisley, Eastwood and Inverclyde were broadly as at present, the West region was essentially formed. He agreed with Renfrewshire Council that Langbank was more naturally aligned with Bishopton and Erskine and its removal from Renfrewshire West into Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald posed no huge issue. While sympathetic to Renfrewshire Council’s view that something akin to the Westminster boundary was preferable to the inclusion of more of Glasgow into a Renfrewshire constituency, there was precedent in the arrangements for Paisley and Renfrewshire North.
35. He recognised the concerns of Renfrewshire Council and of local people about the inclusion of Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald in the Glasgow region. However, it would be unacceptable to the people of Eastwood for them to be placed in Glasgow Region as an alternative. Doing that would bring the same challenges to Eastwood that Renfrewshire had identified. A Council ward and a school catchment area would be split between two regions. The additional support needs school, Isobel Mair School, was located in Newton Mearns but served the communities in Barrhead, Neilston and Renfrewshire South. Barrhead, Neilston and Uplawmoor had a “G” postcode but had never been part of Glasgow. He recognised the strength of feeling expressed at the previous consultation about Eastwood being put in with parts of Glasgow. Further consultation would be required on Renfrewshire’s counter-proposal in that regard.

36. Broader consideration was required about the configuration of the Glasgow region, looking at the various intersections with Glasgow. The Commission needed to look at it again in the round, including the northern part of the West Scotland Region and the boundaries between Glasgow and places like Strathkelvin and Bearsden and Clydebank and Milngavie.
37. The name Renfrewshire West did not accurately reflect the communities within that constituency, some of whom lived within the south east of Renfrewshire. Some of those communities would live in Renfrewshire West for elections to the Scottish Parliament but in East Renfrewshire for elections to the UK Parliament. He suggested that the name Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley might be more appropriate. There was precedent for naming constituencies in the area to have a name in that form, such as Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley or Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley.

### **Summary of the Issues**

38. Boundaries Scotland's proposals were generally well-received in relation to the revised constituencies. The arrangements for Paisley, Johnstone and Neilston met with approval, as did the placing of Bishopton in the same constituency as Erskine. It was suggested that Langbank should also be placed in the same constituency as its near neighbours for the same reason as Bishopton had been.
39. Much more controversial was the inclusion of parts of the City of Glasgow within the Cardonald portion of the proposed new constituency of Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald. Almost everyone who spoke at the Inquiry could see no geographical or local ties between Glasgow and the rest of the constituency. Erskine and Bishopton in particular are some way from the city with open countryside between them, while Renfrew is the Burgh from which the surrounding county takes its name. Criticism of this proposal was made in relation to Rule 1, Rule 3 and Rule 4. Several speakers pointed out that other Wards around the periphery of the Glasgow City Council area appear to have much closer ties and local links to Glasgow than those Renfrewshire towns. Local feelings appear to be strong in this respect and the issue may merit further consideration.

40. Mr O’Kane MSP suggestion that the constituency to the south of Renfrew be re-named Renfrewshire South West and Levern Valley is, I respectfully suggest, worthy of consideration for the reasons which he gave.
41. Most of the Inquiry was given over to discussion of the Commission’s Provisional Proposals for the regions of West Scotland and Glasgow. The proposed inclusion of Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald in the Glasgow region was vigorously opposed. The absence of geographical and cultural, transport and other links between Glasgow and the Renfrewshire elements of the seat to which I previously referred were stressed in this context. It was submitted that the principal transport links between the parts of the West Scotland Region which lie north of the River Clyde and those which are on its south bank are located in that constituency which would be part of the Glasgow region.
42. The regional Rules require that a constituency must fall wholly within a region and the electorate of each region must be as close as possible to that of the others as is practicable, having regard to special geographical considerations. The Commission requires therefore to make arrangements which balance out the declining growth of the Glasgow electorate and the rising growth of that in Renfrewshire. Its decisions must be based on the figures for the 2022 electorate.
43. In that respect submissions were made that the rapidly rising population in parts of Renfrewshire would lead to the result that the proposed Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency would be likely significantly to exceed the electoral quota well before the next boundary review would take place. This consideration was prayed-in-aid with respect to both the challenges to the creation of the new constituency and to its inclusion within Glasgow region. Boundaries Scotland must make its proposals based on the changes to the electorate up to the 2022 figures and no further. In his submission on behalf of Renfrewshire Council, Mr Conaghan acknowledged that requirement but suggested that where the Commission was aware of a significant rise in the electorate in a particular area it would be unwise to create a constituency containing that area which was already well in excess of the electoral quota.

44. Significant objections were raised by Renfrewshire Council which appear to have cross-party support and to reflect local views. On behalf of the Council Mr Conaghan suggested that this was the result of a flawed approach by the Commission from the outset because of the Council grouping approach which it chose to adopt. Two-thirds of the electorate of the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald seat lived in Renfrewshire so it was not reasonable to include that constituency in Glasgow Region. Certain Council Wards would be split between two Regions as would the catchment areas of two secondary schools. These are powerful arguments in favour of some reconsideration of this issue.
45. It would not be appropriate for me to make any comment on Renfrewshire Council's indication that they would seek judicial review of any decision by Boundaries Scotland to proceed in accordance with the Provisional Proposal.
46. Renfrewshire Council's counter-proposal pointed to the proximity of parts of East Renfrewshire with Glasgow and their connections to the city which were said to be closer than those of most parts of Renfrewshire. However, as was indicated on behalf of East Renfrewshire Council, the counter-proposal creates similar problems in East Renfrewshire to those which brought about the objections from Renfrewshire. The argument that it would be a poor solution to a problem to move it into the neighbouring local authority is also a powerful one. Given the strength of local feeling demonstrated in Eastwood during the previous consultation round it can reasonably be assumed that the implementation of the counter-proposal would be likely to attract major opposition from East Renfrewshire Council and the residents of Eastwood. There has been no public consultation in relation to the counter-proposal. Adoption of the original Commission proposal or of the Renfrewshire counter-proposal relating to Eastwood would be likely to give rise to an undesirable situation where there would be opposition and dispute between the Councils of Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire.
47. There is no easy answer to this issue and there is no obvious solution I could or would venture to suggest to Boundaries Scotland. Some speakers proposed that other constituencies on the periphery of the City of Glasgow would be a more appropriate fit



for Glasgow region than the Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire ones and that suggestion also featured within Renfrewshire Council's counter-proposals. That may well be a possible answer but I am unable to comment on the basis of the information available to this Inquiry.

48. Accordingly I do not consider that it would be appropriate for me to make any recommendations to the Commission with regard to the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency or with regard to the West Scotland and Glasgow regions. I commend each of the proposals and counter-proposals set out above to Boundaries Scotland for their detailed consideration and this Report is presented with the intention of offering some assistance as it seeks to exercise its statutory discretion to determine the best practical solutions in accordance with the Rules it must follow.

Reported by

Sean F Murphy KC

Sheriff Principal of North Strathclyde

16 December 2024

## **Appendix**

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

### Afternoon Session

Bruce MacFarlane, Office Manager for Natalie Don-Innes MSP (Renfrewshire North and West)

Mark Conaghan, Head of Corporate Governance, Renfrewshire Council

Alex Brown, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party

Neil Bibby, MSP (West Scotland Region)

Councillor Kevin Montgomery, Secretary of the Labour Group, Renfrewshire Council

Gerry Mahon, Chief Legal Officer, East Renfrewshire Council

Hugh McMahon, member of the public (former MEP for the West of Scotland Region)

Councillor Owen O'Donnell, Leader of the East Renfrewshire Council

### Evening Session

Paul O'Kane, MSP (West Scotland Region)