

BOUNDARIES SCOTLAND

LOCAL INQUIRY

Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries

Held at :

Courtyard Glasgow Airport Hotel
Airport Business Park
Marchburn Drive, Glasgow
Paisley, PA3 2SJ

on

Thursday, 28th November, 2024

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY

(Afternoon and evening sessions combined)

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SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Well, good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for coming along on this very sub-zero day here to the Courtyard Hotel for the local inquiry into the proposed Boundary Commission revised proposals for the Renfrewshire area. It is an important matter and thank you all for giving up your time and coming along today. For those of you who have not met me before, my name is Sean Murphy, I am the Sheriff Principal of North Strathclyde and as such serve as the Assistant Commissioner for the purpose of chairing local inquiries of this nature. Could I start with one or two housekeeping matters? I understand that no fire alarm practices are scheduled, so if the fire alarm goes off it is for real and can we all quickly make our way out here and along the main corridor towards the front door and out towards the car park? Can I say one word of warning? I have been advised to indicate, if you have not registered your car registration number with the front desk and you are in the car park, you will be liable to a parking ticket. So, if you have not done so, please take the opportunity to do that now before you speak. And could I also - the standard curse of the modern world - could I ask everyone please to make sure that your mobile phones are either silent or off for the time being? Now, what I propose to do is to make the opening statement, then I will invite the various people who have registered to speak to speak in the order in which they registered and then I will open the floor if anyone else wishes to ask anything. Could I ask people who are speaking to come forward please to speak from the chair beside me because these excellent and highly skilled young people to my left are actually responsible for the production of a transcript and the area here is miked up so that you can be heard properly and, more importantly, recorded by the transcription team as well for accuracy. So, could I ask those who are making a contribution to come forward and speak from here for those purposes? And when people have presented their submissions in that way I will open the floor and invite questions for clarification or whatever to each speaker as we did last year if there are any points that they wish to clarify, and hopefully we will take it from there. So, I will now turn to the opening statement which I have to read formally at the start of every hearing.

This local inquiry provides you with an opportunity to make further comments or suggestions on the Commission's provisional proposals for the Glasgow and West Scotland Regions and its further proposals for the constituencies of Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald and Renfrewshire West. A transcript of today's proceedings is being made and will be published on Boundaries Scotland website along with my report.

Local inquiries are held by the Commission in areas where a local authority has objected to the proposals or where there has been a strong local response and where the Commission feels it requires 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 the electorate of each constituency and therefore each Region 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 Parliamentary boundaries, to ensure electoral fairness.

Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998 requires Boundaries Scotland to conduct reviews of Scottish Parliamentary boundaries for constituencies and Regions at intervals of every 8 to 12 years.

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

The Second Review must be completed by 1st May 2025, when the legislation requires the Commission to submit its final recommendations to Scottish Ministers.

In formulating its proposals, the Commission has a statutory duty to apply Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998. That Schedule sets out a set of rules to be applied when designing constituencies and Regions.

The constituency rules can be summarised as follows:

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

Rule 1 – So far as 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 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 review and is 59,902 electors for the present review. Best practice from the Venice Commission (Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters) and previous reviews suggests that 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.

The Region rules may be summarised as follows :

Rule 1 - a constituency must fall wholly within a Region, and

Rule 2 - the Regional electorate of a Region must be as near as the Regional electorate of each of the other Regions as is practicable having regard, where appropriate, to special geographical considerations.

These rules provide a lot of flexibility. Rules 1 and 2 highlight the importance of identifying practicable solutions and anticipate departures in light of other considerations. Sometimes these rules can be seen as conflicting and the Commission must exercise its discretion in deciding the appropriate weight of each rule in any given constituency or Region. It is important to remember that the solution must work for Scotland as a whole. An ideal solution for one constituency might lead to very problematic solutions in other areas. The task is to balance the different options to arrive at a solution that works for as many as possible.

The Commission recognises that changes to boundaries 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 of arrangements for 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 catchment areas or local authority boundaries or the remit of community Councils. Electoral boundaries are purely for the purposes of identifying constituencies or Regions for elections.

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

The Commission consulted on Provisional Proposals for constituencies between May and June of 2023. Renfrewshire Council objected to those proposals because they did not reflect local ties as Paisley and Johnstone were split between constituencies and there was little to connect Lochwinnoch and Newton Mearns in a Renfrewshire South constituency. Local inquiries were held in Johnstone and Newton Mearns. The transcript and Assistant Commissioner's report from those inquiries are available on the Commission's website.

The Revised Proposals for constituencies were published and consulted on between April and May of 2024. They addressed the concerns from the earlier consultation by placing Johnstone and Renfrew in single constituencies and proposed constituencies which more closely resembled the existing boundaries in Renfrewshire. Renfrewshire Council stated that the Revised Proposals were an improvement to the Provisional Proposals but raised concerns about an Erskine and Cardonald constituency because it included part of a Glasgow Govan Ward. Renfrewshire Council also suggested renaming the constituency

Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald to reflect the largest population within it. No local inquiries were held in Renfrewshire following publication of the Revised Proposals for Constituencies.

Further Proposals for Constituencies and Provisional Proposals for Regions were both consulted on in September 2024 for one month. In Renfrewshire the Commission considered the feedback from Renfrewshire Council and in its Further Proposals renamed the Erskine and Cardonald constituency as Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald. The Further Proposals reverted to the existing boundary by Neilston to maintain local ties in the Lavern Valley, as well as by the Phoenix Retail Park at Paisley to better reflect local ties in the wider area. The boundary was amended to the west of Bishopton, better to reflect local ties between Bishopton and Erskine and consider the electoral quota. The boundary was also amended by Shieldhall to align with a ward boundary as suggested during the consultation.

The Provisional Proposals for Regions include part of Renfrewshire (the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency) in a Glasgow Region. The existing Region boundary follows the Council area between Glasgow and Renfrewshire Council areas.

Renfrewshire Council objected to the proposed Glasgow and West Scotland Regions on the basis that no Renfrewshire constituency should sit within a Glasgow Region. There were some responses from the general public raising similar concerns.

For the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency, Renfrewshire Council reiterated its concerns that no part of any Glasgow constituency requires to be included in any constituency covering the Renfrewshire area given the current electorate numbers in Renfrewshire. For the Renfrewshire West constituency, Renfrewshire Council raised concerns about removing part of Ward 8.

Renfrewshire Council made suggestions for both Renfrewshire West and Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituencies: to include Langbank in the same constituency as Bishopton, to avoid splitting wards to the north and west of Paisley to avoid voter confusion and that the proposed boundary in Cardonald follow the UK Parliament constituency boundary.

There were several other responses commenting on the constituency proposals in this area, including: opposition to the proposed Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency because there was little to connect communities in Glasgow; and suggestions to include Langbank in a constituency with Bishopton. There was some support for the proposed Renfrewshire West boundary by Neilston which maintained local ties in the Lavern Valley.

Since the last review of Scottish Parliament boundaries, Renfrewshire has seen an above average growth in its electorate while Glasgow has not. The Commission must consider changes to the electorate across the whole of Scotland, so even areas with less electorate change than others may find that the constituency boundaries alter because of change required elsewhere to ensure that all constituencies and Regions across Scotland are of a similar electoral size.

The Commission welcomes all comments and alternative suggestions to its Provisional Proposals for Regions (West Scotland and Glasgow Regions) and further proposals for constituencies (Renfrewshire West and Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald), not just on those issues raised in my statement today, noting again that the alternative designs must meet the legislative requirements to 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 my report and all the responses to the public consultation and on its proposals for constituencies and Regions and a transcript of today's inquiry when it agrees either further proposals for consultation or its final recommendations for constituencies and Regions.

Can I just add two things to that briefly? My role as Assistant Commissioner is a quasi independent one, in fact, which I have ex officio, and, if you have not seen them already, detailed maps showing the proposals and Regions are on the back wall there, if you have not had a chance to look at them, and you might find that helpful. So, I will now invite first to speak Mark Conaghan from Renfrewshire Council, who is their head of corporate governance. He has not arrived yet. I will turn then to Bruce McFarlane, who is speaking on behalf of Natalie Don-Innes MSP.

MR McFARLANE: Thank you very much.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: If you have a written copy of what you are going to say, could you please, if you have got one to spare at the end, provide it to the transcript team for verification purposes, or if it is possible could you email into us for verification purposes and for the preparation of the transcript? We found that very helpful last time. Thank you. Mr McFarlane.

MR McFARLANE: Thank you very much. Yes, as introduced there, my name is Chris McFarlane and I'm representing Natalie Don-Innes MSP today. In regard to the constituencies, namely Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald, Natalie welcomes that they now include Bishopton as outlined in the previous submission. Bishopton has strong local ties with Erskine, including the fact that children from Bishopton receive their secondary non-denominational education at Park Mains in Erskine and the denominational pupils will receive their secondary education at Trinity High School in Renfrew. Therefore, having Bishopton included within the revised Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency is welcomed.

We would also further respectfully submit that by applying the same factors to Langbank that would apply to Bishopton, it would also indicate that it would be prudent for Langbank to be included within this constituency in any further revised proposals.

As previously submitted, we do not believe that any part of Glasgow should be within a Renfrewshire Seat. The Commission's guidance states that constituencies should preferably be within one local authority area. An additional consideration which the Commission gives weight to is the local ties and geographical considerations, and we

would highlight that the M8 motorway separates Cardonald from Renfrew and indeed the only way to travel to Cardonald from Erskine would be to getting three buses as there are no direct local transport routes between these two areas.

We understand that the Commission has a duty to ensure an evenly distributed amount of electors as possible. However, to simply group the Renfrewshire Seats with Glasgow, when trying to reduce the Glasgow constituencies, does not appear prudent. It appears as if the Commission has not considered other potential areas surrounding Glasgow that would be more appropriate, such as suburbs that have more direct transport links and other local connections. Consideration should also be given to the fact that the population of Bishopton is still expected to rise with the building of homes in this location not expected to be completed until 2032. Therefore, should Cardonald be removed or a smaller part of Cardonald be in the constituency, the number of electors will likely only be below the quota for a short period of time.

Throughout these reviews the Renfrew Seats have repeatedly changed. The current proposals for Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency appears to be removing some of the villages from the current Renfrewshire North and West constituency to instead substitute in part of Glasgow. Whilst we understand that the Commission are working to tight deadlines, we do not believe the inclusion of any part of Glasgow in a Renfrewshire Seat is appropriate. If there is simply no other way but to include Cardonald in a Renfrewshire Seat, the size of Cardonald as a proportion of the constituency should reduce.

Finally, in regard to the name of the constituency, should the boundaries not change, our submission would be that the Seat is renamed to Renfrewshire North and Cardonald. The current proposed wording results in the villages of Bishopton and Inchinnan not being named and they would be the only villages not to be specifically referenced. That's for the constituencies. Are you happy for the Regions?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes.

MR McFARLANE: Thank you.

In regard to the proposed Regions to include Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald within the Glasgow Region, we cannot emphasise enough how strongly we oppose this proposal. As highlighted in Natalie's previous submission, Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald is a predominantly based Renfrewshire Seat. Renfrewshire's Valuation Joint Board comprises of Inverclyde, Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire Councils, whereby these local authorities work closely together. Furthermore, these three local authorities work closely together with the Civil Contingencies Board in the case of Region-wide emergencies or disasters.

Renfrewshire is distinct and separate from Glasgow. Renfrew is a Royal Burgh in its own right, and Erskine and Bishopton are several miles away from Glasgow, separated by countryside.

People in Renfrewshire do not consider themselves living or being from Glasgow. To

place this constituency within the Glasgow Region will absolutely lead to voter confusion. It would also result in Ward 2, Renfrew South and Gallowhill being split between two different Regions, Gallowhill being in the West and Renfrew South remaining in Glasgow. Similarly, the current constituency proposals would have Ward 11 also split between two different Regions, and I believe if you were living in Langbank you would actually have to leave the West Scotland Region and go through the Glasgow Region before you could go back into the West Scotland Region in another part of the constituency. Renfrewshire is also distinct from Glasgow with the fact that we have a PA postcode and this would further add to voter confusion.

We would also like to highlight the constituencies of Dumbarton, Clydebank and Milngavie and Strathkelvin and Bearsden would be physically separated from the rest of the West Scotland Region under these proposals. Coming from these constituencies you would have to travel through the Glasgow Region via the Erskine Bridge or the new bridge at Yoker before you could then reenter the West Scotland Region.

Should an additional constituency be required for the Glasgow Region, there are much more suitable alternatives that could be considered. For example, residents in Eastwood have a G postcode and would appear to be more closely linked with Glasgow, and that would appear to be a more reasonable option than the current proposals of including the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency.

Even by placing the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency back in the West of Scotland, it would still have a total electorate that is currently less than the proposals for South Scotland and the remaining Glasgow Seats will still have a fairly large electorate with clear geographical determinations, albeit we recognise it is only higher than the Highlands.

We would therefore, again, in the strongest possible terms reject any proposal to place the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency within the Glasgow Region. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you. Can I just ask, are there any questions for clarification that anyone wants to ask from what Mr McFarlane has said? No.

MR MCFARLANE: Thank you very much.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Now, Mr Conaghan is with us, so I will ask him to step forward at this point and speak on behalf of Renfrewshire Council. Mr Conaghan, as last time, I think you were here as well, I was asking if anyone, if you have a written version of what you are saying, if it could be left with the transcription team or emailed into them later for the purposes of checking the accuracy when we are producing the transcription in due course.

MR CONAGHAN: Okay.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you. Please go ahead.

MR CONAGHAN: I haven't prepared a written submission as such. I was going to refer

back to the submission which has previously been put forward for the Council and I should also make clear it is also the response for the Returning Officer, Alan Russell, who is the Returning Officer for the Renfrewshire Council area and was also the Regional Returning Officer for the West Scotland Region at the previous Scottish Parliament elections.

In submitting this response, the Council wished to make clear that the outcome that has been put forward, or the suggested outcome which has been put forward by the Boundary Commission at this second stage and also in respect of the initial proposals for the West Scotland Region very much falls into the category of what we predicted would happen based on what we feel is a flawed approach taken by the Boundary Commission at the outset of this process. We made very, very clear in our initial response that we were not satisfied that the constituency design approach set out in the consultation document was appropriate. Renfrewshire was included in a grouping with East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde and Glasgow City Councils and, as we set out in that initial response, the proposals have resulted in 12 constituencies falling within these Council areas. It then sets out that this grouping will lose one seat. The logic for that approach was difficult to understand, had no basis in the legislative position or the rules set out by the review. It also wholly ignored the potential impact on the Regional review, and by starting with that grouping the Commission has in effect predetermined the outcome of the review without any regard to the rules that apply to the review; a seat must be lost from that grouping. This is irrespective of whether any such geographical considerations apply, such as Rule 3, or local ties, Rule 4, and such an approach not only risked illogical results but was open to challenge. We also said in that initial submission that it also created a situation where only electors within these seats covered by these four Councils were at risk of moving their Regional area while wholly excluding electors within the rest of the West of Scotland Region. There was no justification given by the Commission for that approach and it did not stand up to close scrutiny when the results were considered, and the constituencies themselves appeared to have been designed without due regard to the maintenance of local ties.

What we then go on to say is that the provisional proposals now made for the Regions have borne out all of the concerns which were expressed by the Council at that stage 1. The view of the Council is that the Commission has fettered its discretion by adopting the Council grouping approach. It appears that the Commission has closed its mind to the consideration of other constituency boundaries neighbouring Glasgow and to consideration as to whether any changes of these boundaries could have resulted in the Glasgow Region being maintained without the inclusion of another Seat where the majority of the geography and electorate lie almost entirely outwith the Glasgow boundary. It has also failed to consider whether one of those other neighbouring constituencies would be more appropriate to be considered as part of Glasgow Region. There is no logical, reasonable or statutory basis for this approach. It has resulted in a proposal which creates the issues which we will go on to discuss and it has created the illogical result which the Council's initial submission identified as a potential risk which could give rise to a challengeable decision.

To be frank, we have arrived at a result which we envisaged on day 1, and I think that has been baked in by a flawed process which has been adopted by the Commission.

If I can move on to the discussion of the individual constituencies. We note the proposal to include Neilston within the Renfrewshire West seat, and given the existing Scottish Parliamentary seat includes Neilston, the Council understands the proposal and has no objection to that in principle. The Council also notes the proposal to remove Bishopton from this seat, and we assume that this is with a view to balancing the quota as the revised constituency is now listed at 60,700; in other words, if you were to leave Bishopton in that seat whilst also taking Neilston in, it clearly creates significant quota issues. So, we can understand the logic of that particular suggestion. However, subject to the contents set out below in respect of the Region, the Council has no objection to Bishopton being moved from this constituency to that of the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald seat. There are significant links between Bishopton and Erskine, particularly with regards to the school catchment areas. However, we would observe that this change now breaks the links between Langbank and Bishopton, which are significant local ties. We also note the proposal to remove part of Ward 8 from this constituency and place it in the Paisley constituency. We note that this was not previously consulted upon. The Council does not support this change, which creates another split in a Council Ward. Such changes should be avoided where possible as they create voter confusion, and we are not really clear on the basis as to why that has been put forward.

With regard to the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald seat, the Council repeats the comments made in previous submissions, that no part of any Glasgow constituency requires to be included in any constituency covering the Renfrewshire area given the current electorate numbers in Renfrewshire. Cardonald could be removed from this constituency with other alterations being made across the other two Renfrewshire constituencies, and if that were to happen then perhaps this constituency could be renamed Renfrewshire North. However, should the Commission wish to retain some element of Cardonald within an Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency, the Council's submission is that this should be restricted to only those areas of Cardonald that fall within the Paisley and Renfrewshire North UK Parliamentary constituency. There is no need to create yet another new boundary for this election. It will create further voter confusion. The electorate number under the current proposal is 62,842, which is well in excess of the quota, which I believe is 59,900 approximately. Limiting the boundary in the manner suggested by the Council (in other words, by taking out the additional part of Cardonald which is now proposed to be put in) would reduce the electorate by approximately 4,000, meaning that under the Council's proposal we would actually be closer to the quota than under the Boundary Commission's proposal.

We appreciate that the Commission has necessarily created proposals using the 2022 electorate figures. However, we would identify to the Commission that Bishopton includes the largest growth area in the whole of Renfrewshire (if not Scotland) in Dargavel village. There has been a rise in the electorate in that area since 2022 of approximately fifteen hundred voters. Accordingly, if an election was to be called tomorrow on the new proposed boundaries, we estimate that the actual electorate would be in excess of 64,300; in other words, approximately 7.5% over the quota.

Based on current build out rates, we anticipate that by the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections this proposed boundary would see an electorate in excess of 65,000. There are

still approximately, 2,000 houses to be built in the Dargavel area. There is also major development in the Renfrew area. It is likely that by the next Scottish Parliament review this constituency would have an electorate well in excess of 70,000. It does not make any sense standing the factual background for the Boundary Commission to propose a seat, even on the 2022 electorate, which is three and a half thousand voters north of the suggested quota. I find it difficult to express how illogical it is to ignore the factual position. I appreciate that the Boundary Commission must use the 2022 figures, but factually there is already a significant growth in that area beyond the 2022 figures and over the next five to 10 years it will get even worse. So, do not start from a figure which is three and a half thousand over the recognised quota. Start below, at best, and appreciate that there is going to be an increase.

The removal of the additional area of Cardonald, in our submission, is necessary for quota purposes as well as avoiding yet another electoral boundary. I appreciate that Mr McFarlane has talked about the actual geographical challenges in respect of Cardonald, and I would absolutely recognise the comments he makes. There is not really a connection in terms of geography or local ties between Cardonald and Renfrew, or Renfrewshire as a whole. However, the one matter which does exist is an existing UK Parliamentary boundary, which we have to say we objected to that, in terms of that review, but there is a part of Cardonald and Peterlee which has some connection now on a Parliamentary basis. It does not make any sense to further extend that and create even more confusion.

The final issue we wish to raise in respect of proposals for this constituency is the suggestion that part of Ward 4 should be included. The area suggested extends to Glasgow Airport and some farmland that covers a total of seven voters. We can see no reason for this to happen. Again, I'm going to be blunt. For seven voters to be moved and to deliberately split a Council Ward to move seven voters: there is no logical reason to do that. The only reason we can see for the Commission to have put that forward is a vain attempt to try and justify some inclusion of this seat in the West Scotland Region by saying, "but Glasgow Airport's in it." The only reason that Glasgow Airport is in this seat is because the Boundary Commission are now choosing to divide Ward 4 and move seven voters. I am reticent to use the word "gerrymandering" but it is somebody sitting with a map and trying to justify the answer they want to reach at the end of this process. There is no logical reason to do it whatsoever.

Going to the Regional proposals, the Council does not and will not accept any suggestion that any constituency within Renfrewshire should fall within the Glasgow Region. This proposal has resulted from the approach adopted by the Commission. As previously stated, there is no logical or reasonable and, more importantly, statutory basis for this approach. The role of List MSPs is such that the Regions they represent must have understandable geographical boundaries and contain electorates with local ties, common interests and connections. Even a cursory examination of the maps of the proposed West Scotland and Glasgow Region highlight how illogical the proposals are. There is no reasonable connection between Bishopton and Erskine in the far west of Renfrewshire with Glasgow. It would appear that no regard has been had to the maintenance of local ties and special geographical circumstances. And, indeed, the removal of Erskine and Renfrew from the West Scotland Region creates a Region in two parts, where there is no

physical or transportational links between those two parts. Again, I think Mr McFarlane passed comment on this. In the existing West Scotland Region the areas north and south of the River Clyde are connected by the Erskine Bridge and Renfrew Ferry and there will also soon be the new Renfrew Bridge. Under the Commission's current proposals, all links between the north and south of the West Scotland Region will be broken, and all of these connections lie within the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency. Transferring this into the Glasgow Region breaks all of the physical connections between the north and south of the West Scotland Region. This constituency is pivotal to the geography of the Region and cannot be removed from it. So, to be very, very clear, if you take all of the current constituencies as proposed by the Boundary Commission and work on the assumption that those are to be established and that they are going to be accepted, which is obviously not the Council's position, the one Seat that you would not take out of the West Scotland Region would be the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald Seat, because that is the one Seat that then breaks the connection between the north and south. It is completely and utterly illogical to take that seat and make that seat the one that goes into Glasgow because it breaks that connection between the north and south.

The Council's primary position remains that the Commission should have considered each constituency boundary with Glasgow separately. There should have been no Council grouping exercise whatsoever. Had this been done, then it is highly likely that all of the constituencies covering the Glasgow area would have contained: one, a majority of their geographical areas covering Glasgow; two, a majority of the electorate in each of them, being from within the Glasgow City Council area; and, three, an overall electorate which would have sustained the Glasgow Region.

Picking up the point that has been made by Mr McFarlane, the current proposals see a West Scotland Region which is approximately 30 or 40,000 lower than the Glasgow Region. If you take the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald Seat back out, that pivots in the other direction. I don't see any reason why that can't be the way that the maths work. However, had you started considering what the numbers were going to be for the Glasgow Region and then looked around all of the boundaries with Glasgow, it would have been possible to take small parts of all of the neighbouring constituencies to come back to that central number that you would have wished for the Glasgow Region - rather than saying, "We're going to take four Councils, lump them all into a grouping and a seat has to go from there." I just can't accept that that was the correct approach from the start. And when you start to think about areas in Clydebank that are immediately adjacent to Yoker, and areas in Bearsden which are immediately adjacent to areas such as Drumchapel, and you work your way round the Glasgow boundary, you can see that you could have created a number of sensible Glasgow Seats which would have then stayed within a Glasgow Region and it would have had small knock-on effects for theseats on the outside, but would still have maintained some degree of local ties. The approach which has been taken is just fundamentally flawed.

Instead, the proposal which is now made is that Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency should be part of Glasgow Region. This constituency has the vast majority of its geography in Renfrewshire, it also has two thirds of the electorate in Renfrewshire. Moreover, the constituency contains part of three Council Wards - Wards 2, 4 and 11. This means that the voters in the same Council Wards would find themselves in entirely

different Regions. This is wholly illogical and unreasonable. It would also create a situation where certain issues in those Wards would be covered by 14 different MSPs, and the example that we have given in the submission is to look at school catchment areas. So, taking Park Mains High School in Ward 11 and Trinity High School in Ward 2, those would fall into two separate Regions. Any MSP interest in matters in relation to those schools would now extend to 14 MSPs. It just does not make any sense.

Under the existing Scottish Parliamentary election arrangements, the Returning Officer for the Renfrewshire area is responsible for three constituencies and is also the Regional Returning Officer, i.e. all of the Returning Officers in the West Scotland Region report their results to him.

Under the new proposal, we would absolutely expect that the Returning Officer for Renfrewshire would remain the Returning Officer for three constituencies. As I have indicated, two of them would lie wholly within Renfrewshire and the third would have the vast majority of its geography and two thirds of the population being Renfrewshire residents. We would also therefore expect that he would remain the Regional Returning Officer. We can't see any reason why that would change. So, you would have a situation where all of the Returning Officers in the West Scotland Region would be reporting their results to him as the Regional Returning Officer. But under these proposals you would see him having to then report the results for one Seat to the Regional Returning Officer for Glasgow. So, the Regional Returning Officer for Renfrewshire would be reporting a result to the Regional Returning Officer for Glasgow. Again, it just points out or highlights how illogical the suggestion that is currently being made is.

Should the Commission wish to insist on the current constituency proposals - and we have obviously made our objections to those in respect of Cardonald - it must give consideration to which other of the proposed constituencies bordering upon the Glasgow constituencies would be best suited for inclusion in the Glasgow list.

It is noted that the Eastwood constituency is limited to one Council area. The vast majority of the population within that constituency reside in areas such as Thornliebank, Clarkston, Busby and Newton Mearns. These areas would reasonably be regarded by most as suburbs of Glasgow and are often described as part of Greater Glasgow. They have significant transport and infrastructure links with Glasgow. Bishopton, Erskine and Renfrew could not be so regarded and do not have the same links. If you asked a member of the public, "Where is Clarkston?", they will tell you it's Glasgow. If you Google "Clarkston" it comes up as Glasgow. If you Google "Busby" it comes up as Glasgow. If you Google "Bishopton" you are not going to find any reference in there to Glasgow. Moreover, the inclusion of the Eastwood constituency in the Glasgow Region would prevent the physical division within the West Scotland Region, which I have already discussed. Lest it be seen that I am picking on Eastwood, whilst we would suggest that it would be a more suitable seat, we can also make similar observations regarding the areas of Clydebank, Milngavie, Bearsden, Bishopbriggs and Kirkintilloch. The two constituencies covering those areas would also be more suited to an inclusion in the Glasgow Region than Bishopton, Erskine and Renfrew, and again the inclusion of either of those two seats would not break the north/south divide in respect of the West Scotland Region.

It is hoped that the Commission will give serious consideration to these comments and revise their proposals accordingly. The final point I will make, and it is touched upon in the submission which has been made by the Council: given the Council's views of the Commission's approach, it should come as no surprise to the Commission that there has already been discussion within the Council as to a judicial review of the Boundary Commission's approach. Now, clearly, the Commission has the opportunity to resolve this matter and it wouldn't be appropriate for such proceedings to be raised at this stage, but it would be only fair of me to make clear to the Commission that, as the Council's Chief Legal Officer, it has been raised with me by elected members and, indeed, it was raised at the last Council meeting publicly, which just happened to be on the day that these further proposals were published. The question of judicial review was raised by elected members within the chamber. There is a real strength of feeling amongst our elected members, reflecting the strength of feeling amongst local residents within Renfrewshire, that these proposals cannot go forward in the form that they are, and if the Commission persists in them, I think we will undoubtedly find ourselves in a situation where this will be the subject of a legal challenge. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you. Any clarification questions to Mr Conaghan? Thank you very much.

MR CONAGHAN: Okay, thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Next, Alex Brown for the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party.

MR BROWN: Thank you very much. So, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party is broadly content with the further proposals for constituencies. On the Regional proposals, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party recognise the need to balance the ongoing downward trend in Glasgow's electorate, which we believe will be addressed adequately by the expansion of that Region into northern Renfrewshire. We recognise that Glasgow City Council requires to be grouped with another Council area and the connection with Renfrewshire Council already exists in UK Parliamentary constituencies, so it is a logical connection for Boundaries Scotland to have proposed. We would disagree with any counterproposals to include the Eastwood constituency in the Glasgow Region. There is no similar link in UK Parliamentary constituencies as there is in Renfrewshire, and East Renfrewshire and Glasgow have never been linked in any previous Scottish Parliamentary elections. Such a counterproposal would split East Renfrewshire Council, which is a smaller Council area, between two Scottish Parliamentary Regions. Where Councils would need to be split, it is logical that this is more appropriate for larger Councils, as is the case in South Lanarkshire and the Glasgow Region currently. In its comments Renfrewshire Council proposes that Renfrewshire West be retained in the West Scotland Region and Eastwood constituency be added to the Glasgow Region. The Council describes splitting Council Wards in Renfrewshire as, "Wholly illogical and unreasonable." However, in their proposal this would be the case for voters in Newton Mearns North and Neilston Ward in East Renfrewshire. Renfrewshire Council also note that they understand this proposal and have no objection to it. A proposal to split this Ward in the East Renfrewshire Council area is not consistent with this argument.

Comments that Glasgow and East Renfrewshire share significant links also do not recognise previous consultation responses from East Renfrewshire. We would note that in the consultation on Provisional Proposals for Scottish Parliamentary constituencies in 2023, there was significant local opposition in the Eastwood constituency to the division of East Renfrewshire to include this in a constituency linked to the Glasgow Region. We welcomed Boundaries Scotland's recognition of this in restoring the Eastwood constituency in its current formation and, given that consultation response, we would be concerned if this principle was reversed now. We note that there has not been a similar response in Renfrewshire to recent proposals. We note that Jackson Carlaw, as MSP for Eastwood, has also written to Boundaries Scotland on the 21st of November in advance of this hearing and in lieu of him attending today. In his letter he makes clear his support for the West Scotland Regional proposals and specifically that Eastwood is retained in the West Scotland Region. We will take note of the matters discussed at the hearings today and may provide comments in writing following these hearings.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you. Are there any questions for Mr Brown? Yes.

MR CONAGHAN: If I may, just on the comments in relation to Neilston, you understand that the proposal which is now being made by the Boundary Commission in respect of Neilston arises from submissions which were apparently received after the first consultation from people within that area, not from Renfrewshire Council, and that, secondly, effectively that is putting the boundary back where it is in terms of the current constituency.

MR BROWN: Again, I would just refer you to the final point that I made there about any further comments raised at these hearings today, we would be happy to comment further in writing. I appear as a sort of representative of Jackson Carlaw, but thank you very much, I appreciate that.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Any other issues to be raised? No. Mr Brown, thank you very much.

MR BROWN: Thank you very much.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Next, I call upon Mr Bibby to come forward please, MSP for the West Scotland Region.

MR BIBBY: Thank you and good afternoon. Sheriff, my name is Neil Bibby and I'm a member of the Scottish Parliament for the West Scotland Region. Can I firstly thank you and your Boundaries Scotland team for holding this important inquiry hearing today.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: That is very kind of you, but my job requires me to be here.

MR BIBBY: And thanks to the transcript team as well for providing the transcript. Thank you also for listening to the views that were expressed by myself and many others at the hearing that I was in attendance at in Johnstone, at the last inquiry you held, on the need to keep that town together in one constituency, and that was a very welcome change -

indeed, it was a relatively small one but a very welcome one that was made by Boundaries Scotland. Boundaries Scotland have also since made significant changes following those inquiries, responding to concerns to keep the Eastwood constituency together, in the previous inquiry hearing, and subsequently moving Neilston from the Eastwood constituency and, as we have heard, placing Bishopton in the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency, which was done without an inquiry hearing. Boundaries Scotland, of course, have a duty to take into account all the representations it receives, but I do believe that there is a sense in Renfrewshire and in Renfrewshire communities that they are now suffering some detrimental consequences, knock-on consequences as a result of Boundaries Scotland responding to those concerns that were raised in East Renfrewshire, and perhaps it should be no surprise that Mr Conaghan has indicated that Renfrewshire Council may be considering a judicial review because of those detrimental consequences to Renfrewshire communities that have been a result of responding to concerns elsewhere.

You will be glad to hear, though, I am not going to attempt today to undo all the Commission's work thus far and previous work, but I do think it's important to point out the need now to make changes following concerns that we are hearing in Renfrewshire. David Woodrow of Bishopton Community Council is in the Paisley Daily Express today - I don't know if he's attending one of the hearing sessions - referring to the proposals for Bishopton to be part of the Glasgow Region as "bizarre" and I think he speaks for many people in Bishopton and that area when he says that, and I know my colleague, Natalie Don-Innes - and we have heard from Mr McFarlane - has expressed similar concerns as well. There could, of course, be a need to make radical changes but I would support, at the very least, the submission made by Renfrewshire Council - and I have to say that I don't always agree with Renfrewshire, but on this issue I do have to commend the detailed submission by Mr Conaghan and his excellent presentation earlier on the issues raised. As I have said, a new type of Renfrewshire North Seat, without including electors in Glasgow, could be considered, but if that is to come to pass, it should, as Renfrewshire Council have said, only include the parts of Cardonald that form part of the new UK Parliamentary constituency, and I have to say, from experience of the General Election in July, there was a great deal of confusion amongst voters in that area, and I think that's something I've heard from across Parties. And, as we have heard, that could be created if Boundaries Scotland was to take account of the issues that were represented in terms of Langbank, the issues that have been raised about the seven electors in this particular polling district, and compensated by all of the Johnstone South & Elderslie Ward being part of the Renfrewshire West Seat. And also, given the unique circumstances here, it is also important, as Mr Conaghan said, to note the significant housing development in Dargavel, one of the biggest in Scotland, and the changes in the electorate since 2022. I appreciate that Boundaries Scotland need to look at 2022 electorate, but to go over the quota from that starting position, I think it would be remiss.

But even more concerning is the proposal that that constituency or any revised North Renfrewshire constituency (Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald) forms part of the Glasgow Region. Renfrew is an historic burgh and is the historic County town of Renfrewshire, as the name makes clear. Unlike other areas, there has been an historic boundary between Renfrewshire and Glasgow for centuries, not mere decades. The idea of Renfrew in particular not being part of a Scottish Parliament Region with the rest of Renfrewshire is,

to me and many others, frankly ridiculous and breaks the significant and historical ties that exist within the Renfrewshire community.

The geographic shape of the proposed Region does look very odd because it is very odd, with a long, thin area stretching west of Glasgow, across a number of strips of greenbelt, from Bishopton to Baillieston. It also doesn't make sense from a Glasgow perspective, I would argue, but it also doesn't make sense from a West of Scotland perspective as well I would argue because, as we've heard, at the moment the West of Scotland Region spans north and south of the Clyde and the only direct link between north and south of the Clyde is the Erskine Bridge, which is proposed to be in another Region in Glasgow. That seat, the seat that Erskine is in is the geographic centre of the seat, as we've heard. Taking that seat is ripping the heart out of the West of Scotland Region and I absolutely could not agree with Mr Conaghan more: that is the last seat you would take out of the Region. But under these proposals the Region is split in two and they don't link to each other.

The areas of Renfrewshire all have, as we have heard - I think this is important again demonstrating the historic ties - they all have Paisley postcodes, unlike every other seat in the West of Scotland Region that borders Glasgow, which have Glasgow postcodes, and I think that demonstrates a difference. So, I would commend to you again Renfrewshire Council's submission and that Erskine, Renfrew, Bishopton and Langbank be included in the West of Scotland Region and that all of Renfrewshire is kept together in the West of Scotland Region, taking into account the historic community ties, which I believe is Rule 4, the geographic considerations, which I believe is Rule 3, and also taking account of, as you mentioned earlier, Sheriff Murphy, taking into account keeping together the local authority boundaries, which would make far more sense, in my view, to do. Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence this afternoon.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you. Are there any questions for Mr Bibby? No. Thank you very much.

MR BIBBY: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Next, can I invite forward please Councillor Kevin Montgomery.

COUNCILLOR MONTGOMERY: Thank you. I am Councillor Kevin Montgomery, I am here in a role as Secretary of the Labour Group in the Renfrewshire Council. We are the principal political opposition within Renfrewshire Council and we are very much here in support of the Council's proposal, and I think that that in itself shows the widespread community concern and the strong cross-Party consensus across Renfrewshire in support of the Council's position. It is also perhaps worth noting that I am also employed as a senior case worker for Alison Taylor, MP, so I do have some practical experience of Parliamentary business that goes across local authority boundaries, and I think it's fair to say that there is a fair degree of voter confusion in this area, and I think that Boundaries Scotland and any official agency needs to be very careful about this if you want to retain public confidence in the system.

So, I am speaking on behalf of the Labour Group, as the principal political opposition, but particularly on behalf of the Councillors that the Labour Party has in Renfrewshire North constituency, and particularly Councillor Sam Mullin in Erskine, who has had considerable correspondence from voters and community groups who cannot make sense of the proposals around both the constituency seat that is going to Glasgow and particularly the Regional list.

Obviously, a precedent may have been set by the UK Parliamentary constituencies because of that part of Cardonald, but, as Mr Bibby and Mr Conaghan have already mentioned, that brings its own problems, and we would certainly support any proposal to limit that not going into Glasgow any further because it would just create much more voter confusion.

As the Council's proposal suggests, to scale back the boundary to a Renfrewshire North Seat could be achieved if Langbank formed part of a North Renfrewshire Seat and Boundaries Scotland were to take cognisance of the massive housing development and an increase in population in Dargavel, which is still one of the biggest housing developments in Scotland and, as Mr Conaghan pointed out, there's still about 2,000 houses to be built at this site. And it also should be noted that the houses on this site tend to be large family houses. This is a large increase in population that we are talking about. Perhaps more importantly, I want to make it clear that we are firmly opposed to placing Bishopton, Erskine and indeed Langbank into the Glasgow Region. We think it's bad for administration. The idea of Renfrew not being in a Scottish Parliament Region with Renfrewshire is one that we do not think would command public confidence. The boundary between Renfrewshire and Glasgow has been in place for hundreds of years. We think that there are other moves which are perhaps less radical that could work and, as Mr Conaghan has pointed out, we would support proposals to take smaller pieces of the kind of suburban Glasgow Councils which would over the whole piece make the operation one that is much easier for the public to understand, and do not involve the wholesale taking in of parts into a Glasgow Region that are actually quite far from Glasgow and have, as has previously been pointed out by a number of speakers, very poor public transport links and no actual traditional community ties to these areas also.

I'll just finish up by saying that Boundaries Scotland has already listened to other residents, such as in parts of Eastwood, and the constituency proposals, and the knock-on consequences for Renfrew, and we believe now that Boundaries Scotland should listen to the people's concerns in Renfrewshire and keep all of Renfrewshire together in the West of Scotland Region. We agree with the Council that the approach is flawed and gives a bad result which will not command public confidence and is not a recipe for good electoral governance overall. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you. Now, does anyone have a question for Mr Montgomery? No. Thank you.

MR MONTGOMERY: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Can I now invite Mr Mahon from East Renfrewshire Council to come forward.

MR MAHON: I would like to firstly indicate that East Renfrewshire Council's submission is neither intended to support nor oppose the current proposal regarding the Renfrewshire constituencies falling within the Glasgow Region. In so far as the proposal as it stands relates entirely to an area outwith our geographical boundaries, we would not wish nor feel it appropriate to offer a view on its merits per se. However, we do consider it imperative to attend today to register our strong opposition to the potential arrangement proffered by Renfrewshire Council and others which suggests Eastwood as a viable alternative for inclusion on the Glasgow list and to make Boundary Scotland aware of what we perceive as the flawed logic inherent in that counterproposal.

There are two main strands to our position. In the first instance, Renfrewshire and others assert that Eastwood is reasonably regarded as a suburb of Glasgow. We believe that this neglects and misrepresents the strongly held views of Eastwood residents themselves, which reflect a very distinct local identity, which considers itself separate from Glasgow. Boundaries Scotland is already aware of the local strength of feeling on this issue having heard firsthand at the constituency public inquiry in Parklands, Newton Mearns, the views of local people. Eastwood residents do not see themselves as part of Glasgow - a view vigorously endorsed by local politicians across all of the major political Parties, and was one which we assumed was recognised as significant by Boundaries Scotland itself in their earlier decision to retain the Eastwood constituency as was. We would again ask that they are mindful of the local strength of feeling on the Glasgow boundary issue when considering the configuration of Regions.

Secondly, Renfrewshire makes the case that under the current proposals voters in the same Council Wards would find themselves in entirely different Regions. We also highlight that certain issues, for example, matters relating to school catchments, prompt the potential involvement of up to 14 different MSPs, and they explicitly identify these outcomes as, "Wholly illogical and unreasonable." What has, however, been omitted is that under the counterproposal Ward 2 of East Renfrewshire would itself be split between Regions. Additionally, East Renfrewshire schools, such as Eastwood High, which is a catchment which includes Neilston and parts of Newton Mearns, would also give rise to excessive MSP coverage in pertinent matters - in that case 15 MSPs, including the constituency. Renfrewshire describes the Boundaries Scotland's proposed arrangements as, "Wholly illogical and unreasonable." If that be true, then by their own reasoning their counterproposal must be assessed as equally so. It does not solve the issues they identify as problematic, it merely shifts them to another area.

In so far as Renfrewshire's counterproposal, it's based on what we perceive as a number of misunderstandings of the position within Eastwood. I would hope they would see fit to withdraw the suggestion but, if they do not, I would in any event urge Boundaries Scotland to recognise that, if the current proposal is not pursued, Eastwood would not be seen as a viable alternative to form part of a Glasgow Region. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you. Are there any questions? No. Thank you.

MR MAHON: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Now, the final person on my list is a member of the public and that is Hugh McMahon.

MR McMAHON: Thank you, Chairman. I only found out today that this hearing was taking place from reading the excellent Paisley Daily Express, and I am just an ordinary member of the public, although I was in the past an elected member for the European Parliament for the West of Scotland, which includes the Regional Seat. Indeed, when Kenyon Wright drew up the procedures for the election of the Scottish Parliament, they based the eight Scottish Europe constituencies as the kind of building blocks for the Regional Seats, and I think that was a very wise decision in many ways - at the same time as they introduced the separate electoral system for the Scottish Parliament with the additional member system, which gave a very broad political scope for the Scottish Parliament, and it's been to their benefit.

I am resident of Ralston in Renfrewshire and, although we are geographically not far from Glasgow, we really have very little contact with the Council and with Glasgow District and we see ourselves, people in Ralston see themselves as residents of Renfrewshire and, therefore, are opposed to these proposals. I also think the biggest weakness of the Commission's proposals is that we are making a little few things better by perhaps incorporating the name of Renfrew in the name, and the original proposal of a seat just called Erskine and Cardonald really was a nonstarter, and I would hope that the change of name or the incorporation at least of Renfrew - because Renfrew is one of the key historically in Scotland; the Sheriffdom, the seat of the Stewart Kings and so on. It was very, very important for Scotland politically and economically, and it still is, and it should be maintained. And I cannot see - I understand the difficulty with the declining population in the centre of Glasgow, and the Boundaries Commission obviously have to look at it, but I feel that they have not considered, as the Renfrewshire Council representatives said, the biggest growth point as far as housing, there are two areas where there is a tremendous build up of housing, one is at Braehead and the second one is Dargavel, and you're going to get a population explosion there, and the Council even underestimated the number of children they required to have in schools. So, we see this area where there is going to be a large growth of population, and therefore Renfrewshire should be kept as an entity and it should not be in Glasgow, and that must be maintained. So, that's basically all I want to say.

On the Regional seat, I would keep Renfrewshire in as a separate - and I think it is wrong to put parts of Renfrewshire in the Glasgow Regional seat. I don't think there is great contact, apart from occasional shopping and so on, there's not any, and perhaps occasional football matches and entertainment and theatres and things like that, but basically speaking, people in Renfrewshire see themselves as from Renfrewshire, and Renfrewshire, as Mr Bibby says, is a key point in the West Regional Seat. The West Regional seat starts about Kirkintilloch and goes right down to Arran. I mean, it really is a pretty large seat and I can say that with some feeling, you know, having represented it in the European Parliament for 15 years, and there was an amount of coming and going across that area, and I think Renfrewshire was really the heartland of it. Indeed, I centred my operations in Paisley because it was right in the centre of the Western Regional seat, and I would hope that the Boundaries Commission, when they come up with their proposals, will keep Renfrewshire in the West of Scotland Regional seat.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you. Are there any questions from the floor? Thank you. Can I simply comment, since it relates to one of my predecessors in office, it is wonderful to hear that people do remember and recognise that Renfrew had a Sheriff long before Glasgow and the rest of Scotland. That was a point I had to make recently when we celebrated the new court at Dumbarton. Thank you, sir. Now, would anyone like to raise any points from the floor who has not had an opportunity to speak yet? Yes, please do. Could I ask you to identify yourself for the purposes of the transcript and recording please?

COUNCILLOR O'DONNELL: I am Councillor Owen O'Donnell, leader of East Renfrewshire and, I suppose more importantly, ward Councillor for Newton Mearns North and Neilston. And, as Mr Conaghan, the Chief Legal Officer of East Renfrewshire Council, said, this isn't East Renfrewshire's fight, but obviously we have been drawn into the ring in terms of the counterproposals being proposed by Renfrewshire Council, which is unfortunate. There's some elements of Renfrewshire's submission which we agree with, which Mr Conaghan talked about, in terms of Council Wards being split across Regions as being wholly illogical and unreasonable. The counterproposal will result in exactly the same thing happening in my Ward. It will create a situation where a school catchment area is split across two Regions and that being Eastwood High, and up to 14 different MSPs. So, a solution that is passing a problem which is wholly illogical and unreasonable on to a neighbouring authority is no solution at all. I would also like to reiterate some of the comments that Mr Mahon made on the feelings of Eastwood constituents about being involved in the Glasgow City Region. We haven't had a chance to consult on that with our members given the notice period, but we are absolutely certain that there will be a real strength of feeling of elected members and a real strength of feeling of our electorate, as you saw in the previous review on the constituency boundaries, and there will be no question that there would be disappointment, to say the least, and protest against those moves. So, that is really all I want to say at this stage.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you, sir. Now, are there any questions for Mr O'Donnell? No. Thank you very much.

COUNCILLOR O'DONNELL: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Would anyone else wish an opportunity to speak? Thank you. Well, I suppose technically people do have the opportunity if they wish to come along before 4 o'clock, but it appears that this part of the meeting is over. Please feel free to leave if you wish to do so at this point. Thank you. And thank you to everyone who has come along and made a contribution this afternoon.

(Afternoon session concluded at 15.15pm)

(Evening session commenced at 18.08pm)

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Shall we formally convene this? Mr O'Kane, what normally happens is that I am required to read the opening statement, but have you seen it?

MR O'KANE: I have, yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes, rather than me reading it to you, would you like to look at it, or are you familiar with it?

MR O'KANE: It presumably just covers why we are here?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes. So, would you like to make a statement for the record? The procedure is that it is recorded and we have a transcription that becomes available and that will be published along with my report in due course on the website. So, anything you would like to say, please proceed.

MR O'KANE: Great. Are you happy for - do you want me to come up?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Can you hear Mr O'Kane?

THE SHORTHANDWRITER: Yes, but I would hear him better if ...

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: If you would mind sitting here? Thank you. Please go ahead whenever you are ready.

MR O'KANE: Thank you very much. Well, I'm very grateful, I know it's been a particularly long day and a long process, but I wanted to take the opportunity to feed my views in as an MSP representing West Scotland on two fronts; one on the terms of the constituency boundaries and then I will say something briefly on the Region if that is acceptable.

So, firstly, I think, in terms of the constituencies that we are here to consider this evening, Renfrewshire West and the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald proposed constituency, I would first reflect that I am very supportive of the Renfrewshire West constituency as proposed, although I will say something about Langbank in a moment. The reasons for that I think principally are that it reflects as broadly as possible, I think, the existing Renfrewshire South boundary which is in place and obviously that has been in place, Renfrewshire South, since 2011 and that review of boundaries, and people in that community, across those different communities, have come to understand what Renfrewshire South is as their Scottish Parliamentary constituency. We have gone through a number of iterations to get to the point where Renfrewshire West as proposed has come together and I appreciate the previous comments that were made in respect of the original proposals for this constituency being too large in terms of the Newton Mearns and Neilston and Johnstone, the splitting of Johnstone and those issues that were dealt with in the first round. And then in the second round I had very significant concerns regarding the removal of Neilston and the inclusion of Neilston within Eastwood. That was reflected, I have to say, widely by the community in Neilston. As well as being the original MSP, I for 10 years was the Councillor for Newton Mearns North and Neilston, and I was the Deputy Leader of East Renfrewshire Council, so I have had that context this evening as well. And I think the issue in Neilston is very much, it is part of the Levern Valley and always has been historically, so any move to take it out of that historic tie was vociferously opposed and submissions were made, I know, by Neilston Community Council, and Associations and a whole range of sort of civic organisations in

the village. So, really all of that is to say that any further consideration of Neilston in the context of being removed from the Levern Valley would be vociferously opposed by myself and by the community. And I think, now that the Boundary Commission has decided to return Neilston to the Levern Valley, that is where it must stay.

I think in terms of the broader points about Renfrewshire West: what essentially Renfrewshire West in its form has now allowed to happen is essentially we have the Paisley constituency as it is currently, we have Eastwood as it is currently, we have Inverclyde, for example, as it is currently. So, you can see the shape of the West essentially forming. I would recognise what Renfrewshire Council have submitted in terms of their concerns around Langbank and Langbank being more naturally linked to Bishopton and Erskine. I have no objection to that. I would recognise that also and I don't think that the removal of Langbank from the Renfrewshire West constituency poses a huge issue, because I think Bridge of Weir and the rest of that is a more natural connection into the existing constituency.

So, I will perhaps then leave Renfrewshire West and turn to Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald just because I have alighted there in talking about Langbank. I would recognise - I would preface all of this incidentally by saying that, as a Regional member, it's challenging because you are trying to balance the views of lots of different people in your community and I would recognise some of the concerns that have been raised about splitting communities in that constituency, which is why I understand the desire for Langbank to return to that constituency. I would also recognise much of what was said by Renfrewshire Council about the inclusion of a large part of Glasgow and their desire to perhaps have something more akin to the existing Westminster boundary for Paisley and Renfrewshire North. I do, however, think that there is a challenge in that the precedent has been established in terms of Paisley and Renfrewshire North, that there has been a breach at that part of the boundary into the City of Glasgow. So, I want to respect all of the views that have been made but I think we are in a place where Renfrewshire West absolutely should not change dramatically from where it is currently, and obviously respect the desire of people in the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald constituency to see perhaps some further changes. I will leave the constituencies there if that is acceptable, Sheriff, and move on to some comments about the Region, if I may.

I understand that Renfrewshire Council are concerned about the inclusion of the Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald Seat in the Glasgow Region. I would, again, want to recognise those concerns and recognise the concerns of constituents who live in that part of Renfrewshire. However, I do think it is important to acknowledge that the suggestion, as I have read, by Renfrewshire Council for Eastwood to be offered as an alternative to be put into the Glasgow Region, is, I believe, unacceptable to the people of Eastwood. I understand from conversations that a number of arguments have been made as to why Eastwood would be a more appropriate fit, if you like, to be in that Region. I do not think they hold water because I think they bring with them the same challenges that Renfrewshire have identified. So, for example, if Renfrewshire are concerned about the splitting of a Region between, or the splitting of a Council Ward between Regions, that would be true of Eastwood in the same way that it would be true in parts of Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald. Eastwood High School, for example, would be split between two Regions; its catchment area straddles Neilston and Newton Mearns. In addition, the

additional support needs schools is in Newton Mearns but serves the communities in Barhead, Neilston and parts of Renfrewshire South. So, I do recognise that. I would also recognise that people have made arguments, for example, about postcodes. Barhead, Neilston and Uplawmoor have a G postcode, and they are not part of Glasgow, they have never been part of Glasgow. I don't think anyone would suggest for a second that Uplawmoor, although it has a G postcode, is a part of Glasgow. So, I don't really recognise that as a strong enough argument for Eastwood to be put into the Glasgow Region. I also have to, as I say, represent the views of everyone and I recognise, as I think I've said already, that the views and concerns of people who live in Erskine, Renfrew and Cardonald potentially about that, but I do have to recognise the strength of feeling that was expressed in the first iteration of the consultation around Eastwood being put in with parts of Glasgow, and I think that East Renfrewshire Council, I am sure, made a representation today that I would imagine would have been very strong about that not happening and the need for further consultation because nobody has been consulted essentially on that proposal.

So, I think I perhaps won't go on too much longer but I think to acknowledge that these things are difficult but to acknowledge that if there is to be a broader conversation about the configuration of the Region, and looking at the various intersections with Glasgow, I think that has to be done in a broader sense. I don't think we can have a situation where it appears that local Councils are trading off constituencies against one another where there are broadly similar issues and challenges, and I would appreciate that the Boundary Commission will have to look at all of that in the round. I think that obviously extends to the northern part of the West Region and indeed to the boundary with Glasgow at places like Strathkelvin and Bearsden and Clydebank and Milngavie. So, I do think the Region will need to be looked at in a broader view as well.

And then finally because I forgot to mention it in my discussion of Renfrewshire West, but I wonder if I may say something briefly about the naming of that constituency? Renfrewshire West, I don't think accurately represents the communities within that constituency, and the current constituency is called Renfrewshire South. I think that is acceptable because you could live in the southeast of Renfrewshire, if you lived in the Barrhead, Neilston and Uplawmoor section of that constituency. What they are suggesting, though, I think, is that somebody would live in East Renfrewshire but they would also live in West Renfrewshire, and I think that will be confusing because you essentially have someone who lives in East Renfrewshire for the UK Parliament and for their Council but in Renfrewshire West and the rest of Renfrewshire in their mind for Scottish Parliamentary purposes. I think to that end I would rather see the Seat called something like Renfrewshire West and the Levern Valley, I think that would be a more appropriate name. And it's not unusual for constituencies to be named like that. You know, I can think of Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley or Carrick, Cumnock and the Doon Valley. Inverclyde and Ayrshire West being a double area, a mix of UK and Scottish Parliamentary constituencies. But essentially that is my view on that and having already said that I would be quiet and I did not, I am going to now be quiet. I am very grateful to you, Sheriff.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Thank you very much. I am delighted - it is the first time, I think, in any of these discussions that that has come up, and I have a personal interest

because my daughter worked there for years, and it is a sort of hidden gem. Thank you very much for that. I know you are not members of the public. Are there any clarification points you would like to ask about because I have given that right to everybody throughout the day? Thank you very much, thank you for your time and your contribution.

MR O'KANE: Thank you. May I step down, my Lord?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL MURPHY: Yes, please do. As I often say, you are now free to leave the court with no stain against your name. Thank you.
I will close the proceedings, at 6.20 p.m.

(The session concluded at 18.20 pm)
