

BOUNDARIES SCOTLAND

LOCAL INQUIRY

Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries

Held at:

Falkirk Stadium,
4 Stadium Way,
Falkirk,
FK2 9EE

on

Thursday, 22 August 2024

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE

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AFTERNOON SESSION:

(13.58)

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Good afternoon, everyone. If I can invite everyone to take their seats if you are planning on staying for the inquiry, please. (Pause).

Good afternoon, everyone. That is just about 2 o'clock now so I think we will just make a start if we can and make some progress.

Now, first of all, can I introduce myself and welcome you all to this local inquiry convened by Boundaries Scotland to look at the Falkirk constituencies. My name is Gillian Wade and I am actually the Sheriff Principal of Tayside, Central and Fife. Unfortunately when you take on that job you get all sorts of really bizarre additional jobs that you did not know anything about. So this is one of those and for the purposes of today I have a letter of appointment from the Scottish Government to act as the Assistant Commissioner to the inquiry. So if you are addressing me I am happy for you to address me in any way you like, but if you feel uncomfortable you can simply call me Madam Chair or Assistant Commissioner or whatever you feel is appropriate for you. I am very happy if you address me in any way whatsoever, but if you do feel that you want to attract my attention, please just do so by raising your hand and hopefully I can spot you and then invite you to speak at that stage.

I have been invited to start by giving some housekeeping tips. I believe there is not to be a fire alarm, so if the alarm does go off then that will mean that you are required to evacuate and you just follow the signs, I am told. I do not immediately see any signs but I think basically if you get out of the door into the corridor then you follow the signs from there.

The facilities, should you need them, are out of back door and if I could ask you to come in and leave from the back door rather than this door so that you are not disrupting the speaker because when the speaker comes forward to give their submission they will sit here at this table. So obviously to minimise any disruption if you could leave as quietly as possible and there should not be too much in the way of comings and goings.

I have something of a running order but it is not cast in tablets of stone, so if people do have time pressures or they have to be somewhere else, then please do alert me and you can take your slot earlier on in the day so that we can accommodate everyone who has a desire to speak. I know that some people are here simply to observe and some do want to make an oral contribution. Everything will be recorded so if I can ask you to make sure that when you do come forward to give your submission you identify yourself fully and that you say what organisation you are from, if you are indeed representing an organisation, or what your position is so that is clearly recorded for the transcript and there is no dubiety later on about who said what.

That is really I think all that I have to say by way of opening remarks before we start the formal proceedings. Is there anything anyone would like to raise at this stage? Any questions you would like to ask before I go on to make the opening remarks? (Pause). Everyone quite happy, all right. I hope it stays that way. I notice that nobody has taken up the front seats, which is always the way at these sort of events, but it does mean that there is not going to be any troublemakers at the front throwing things at me or anything like that. So let us hope it proceeds as smoothly. As I say, there are formalities that require to be adhered

to, but it is important that everybody who does want to get their opportunity to make their submission does so and can do so comfortably.

So let me begin by providing an opening statement to put the whole of the inquiry into some sort of context.

The Local Inquiry provides you with an opportunity to make further comments or suggestions on the Commission's Revised Proposals for the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth; Falkirk North and Linlithgow and Falkirk South constituencies. A transcript of today's proceedings is being made, and that will be published on the Boundaries Scotland's website along with my Report in due course.

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

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

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

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

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

Now, in formulating its proposals for constituencies, 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 designating constituencies.

The rules can be summarised as follows: firstly, there are to be 73 constituencies. Three of these are protected so they are not under review, and those are Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and Na h-Eileanan an Iar, which is the Western isles. (And forgive my Gaelic, which is obviously very poor.) The remaining 70 constituencies must meet a set of requirements and must do so in such a way which, so far as practicable, is consistent throughout the whole of Scotland. Rule 1 is this. So far as is practicable, regard must be had to the boundaries of local authority areas.

Rule 2 - The electorate of each constituency is to be as near the electoral quota as is practicable, having regard to Rule 1. The electoral quota is determined by dividing the total number of local government electors on the September 2022 electoral registers for all of Scotland, except the three preserved island constituencies, by 70. The electoral quota remains fixed throughout the period of a review, and that is 59,902 electors for this 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 per cent of the electoral quota is acceptable. The Commission may depart from Rule 1 if it thinks that it is desirable to do so to avoid an excessive disparity between the electorate of a constituency and the electoral quota or between the electorate of a constituency and that of neighbouring constituencies.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now, the Commission consulted on Provisional Proposals for constituencies in 2023. At the Provisional Proposal stage the two constituencies of Falkirk East and Falkirk West were unchanged from the existing constituencies. However, there was strong opposition to some of the other proposed boundaries, especially in Clydebank where a boundary divided Clydebank between two constituencies and in the west of Edinburgh where concerns were raised about the lack of local ties between communities in West Lothian, such as Linlithgow

and the west of Edinburgh. The Commission held local inquiries on its Provisional Proposals in Clydebank and Edinburgh as well as four other locations.

Following feedback from that Provisional Proposal consultation period, the local inquiries and the Assistant Commissioners' Reports the Commission developed new groupings of constituencies. It included a grouping of 17 constituencies within Argyll and Bute, East Dunbartonshire, Falkirk, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire and West Lothian Council areas. This new grouping aimed to address the concerns raised at the Edinburgh and Clydebank local inquiry and provide an alternative solution to the higher than average electorate growth in West Lothian and lower than average electorate in the existing Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency. As a consequence the boundaries within the existing Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency; and the constituencies within Falkirk and West Lothian Council areas were amended at the Revised Proposal stage.

During the one-month public consultation on the revised proposals, held between April and May 2024, Falkirk Council objected to the Revised Proposals for: Cumbernauld and Kilsyth; Falkirk North; and Linlithgow and Falkirk South constituencies and requested a local inquiry because: the Provisional Proposals retained the existing Falkirk East and Falkirk West constituencies and the Revised Proposals are the result of objections obtained or received elsewhere; the Revised Proposals divide Falkirk Council area across three constituencies while the two current constituencies sit within the area and are close to the electorate quota; the Revised Proposals break local ties by Denny; the proposed Falkirk North and Linlithgow and Falkirk South constituencies include the names of current Falkirk Council Wards which will be confusing to the electorate; and finally, it will be challenging to administer cross council area constituencies for elections and confusing for the local electorate.

Under the terms of the legislation, if a council objects to a proposed constituency within its area then a local inquiry must be held.

There were over 40 other responses which mainly opposed the Revised Proposals because: local ties were broken between the communities of Banknock and Hags/Longcroft as well as at Denny; the proposals do not consider the council area boundary; and Denny looks towards Falkirk rather than Cumbernauld.

However a number of responses supported a Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency because it kept those towns with close links in the same constituency. There were also suggestions to include Denny in the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency name.

The Commission welcomes all comments and alternative suggestions to its Revised Proposals in the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth; Falkirk North; and Linlithgow and Falkirk South constituencies, not just on those issues raised in my statement today, but noting again that the alternative constituency designs must meet the legislative requirements for this review.

At the end of this 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, the responses to the public

consultation on its Revised Proposals for constituencies and the transcript of today's inquiry when it agrees further proposals for consultation or its final recommendations for constituencies.

Now can I welcome the first speaker? I have a note here of a number of individuals who have indicated that they would wish to come forward. I have I think, first of all, Mr Denis Johnston on behalf of Jamie Hepburn. Is he present? Yes? No. (Pause). Sorry?

DENIS JOHNSTON: I am just here to observe.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: You are just hear to observe, all right, very well. The next name I have on the list is Alf Kelly. Yes? Can I invite you to come up?

ALF KELLY: You may have stolen some of my fire, I have never seen this explanation of how the Boundary Commission looks at things.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Have a seat, if you want to take a seat and make yourself comfortable.

ALF KELLY: Thank you. So, as you say, I am Alf Kelly. I am privileged to be a member of the local authority in Falkirk and I cover the ward of Denny and Banknock Ward 3. Denny and Banknock has been for many years embedded within Falkirk and the Forth Valley. The Royal Infirmary and other NHS --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Sorry, can I just ask you to maybe slow down a wee bit and speak into the microphone.

ALF KELLY: Sorry.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: And if anyone is having difficulty hearing anything I say or anything any of the speakers say, then simply raise your hand or catch my attention somehow and we can sort that out. Sorry.

ALF KELLY: Not a problem.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

ALF KELLY: So, I will start again then. Denny and Banknock for many years have been embedded within the Falkirk and the Forth Valley. The Royal Infirmary and other NHS facilities that the ward use are still within the Forth Valley. The Police Scotland commander is based in Falkirk and an amazing local community police are based in Larbert and Falkirk. While my objection is generally to the alteration of the boundaries in Falkirk, if these boundaries as proposed are retained I wish to articulate the acute impact this will have, in particular on the people of Banknock, a village within the ward. Banknock as a constituent part of Ward 3 is integrated historically with Haggs and Longcroft, as a community we call them BHL, and under this proposal this community will be divided into different Scottish Parliamentary constituencies. The communities share bus routes, important places and the same community centre. The community hall as a facility that also operates as a polling place for elections; the Banknock, Haggs and Longcroft community hall. It is located conveniently to the east of the village of Banknock and gives those in Haggs and Longcroft easier access to the facility.

The hall is the only place for the polling district FW325 under the 2024 polling scheme as approved by Falkirk Council. In 2021 Scottish Parliamentary elections the hall was responsible for 2,591 eligible electors. The 2024 polling scheme approved by Falkirk Council did not vary these polling districts, which raises a pertinent question: have these Commission proposals taken into account polling stations?

Further, the division of Banknock community from Bonnybridge community, who will be within the Falkirk North constituency, have shared assets. It will be difficult, confusing and acutely impactful on the people of Banknock. The GP clinic is a satellite of Bonnybridge clinic with multiple issues currently reported in accessing local health services by constituents. This creates an acutely concerning overlap of accountability for elected members. The local primary school is located in Banknock under the auspices of Falkirk Council. It takes in the children of Longcroft and Haggs. The main shopping for the community is a local Scotmid shop and Post Office in Haggs, further displaying that Banknock services are integrated within the areas within the proposed Falkirk North constituency, not the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency.

The 35 bus is the principal, in fact the only, bus service for Banknock which runs between Kilsyth and Falkirk. The current MSP has his office in Cumbernauld ... I am sorry, the current Cumbernauld MSP has his office in Cumbernauld, which would require Banknock residents to get two buses to arrive at his office. If we had more offices it would obviously be costly to the public purse. The MSP for Falkirk West at present has his office in Falkirk and Banknock is served by an hourly bus service to Falkirk, which would make it a lot easier. As well as being difficult to get to Cumbernauld, this would cause confusion in the mind of many constituents as their councillor is Falkirk Council, their MP is in Falkirk West and their MSP is in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. We already have a disconnect from politics, as can be seen from the recent election turnouts and I believe this will exacerbate this trend further.

I cannot understand the reason for changing this ward in Falkirk. I have had no official notification as to the reason or to my objections. It may be that another constituency, obviously, has objected to the original changes in the boundaries, and if so that would be very unfair to Falkirk and to Denny and Banknock ward, an area with long, long, historic ties in employment, commercially, shopping, etc, to Falkirk.

I realise that the Boundary Commission deal with lots of numbers, but I as a councillor work to support and help build communities. I believe this in fact will dismantle communities. As a local member for Ward 3, Denny and Banknock, I ask that this community not be butchered in this way. Further, that the Commission's intentions to alter the boundaries across Falkirk Council area be reviewed and Ward 3 Denny and Banknock is appropriately realigned into the indicatively named Falkirk North. Thank you, madam chair, I hope you got that.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, I did indeed.

ALF KELLY: Thank you, that is me. (Pause).

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Kelly. Now, who I have next on my list is Colin Moodie. Yes, Mr Moodie, if you would like to come

forward. (Pause). Again, if I could ask you just to keep your voice up as much as possible and give a full introduction so we all know who you are.

COLIN MOODIE: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So just to begin by introducing myself, as you said, I am Colin Moodie. I am the Chief Governance Officer in --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Sorry, are you having difficulty hearing? If you maybe pull the microphone. (Pause).

COLIN MOODIE: I will try and project a bit more. Is that better for people at the back?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, I am fine because I am right beside you, but, as I say, if you can keep your voice up as much as possible. Thank you.

COLIN MOODIE: I will do my best. Thank you very much. As I said, I am Colin Moodie, I am the Chief Governance Officer in the Falkirk Council. As such I am also Deputy Returning Officer involved in the organising of elections. I should also say, Madam Chair, I am also a solicitor, so if I accidentally slip into calling you my Lady I do apologise in advance.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: That is fine.

COLIN MOODIE: You have already, I think, helpfully summarised the position of the council, which has been submitted in advance in a letter of objection, which in turn was based on a report to the council's executive, and I think that is also before you as one of the documents which is available.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I think that is correct. Can I just check that we are talking about the same document? I am fairly certain that I have that.

COLIN MOODIE: So that should be a report which is headed "For the Council's Executive" on 14 May of this year.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, I am sure that is the one, thank you. The covering letter is 15 May. I think the one I have is 15 May. Is that correct?

COLIN MOODIE: So there is a letter of objection of 15 May, but there should also be a committee report of 14 May which was submitted to your clerks.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

COLIN MOODIE: So both these documents, madam chair, form the position of the council and I formally adopt those as the council's submission. I do not intend to read through those for the purpose of this afternoon's inquiry, but what I will do is make some remarks in relation to some specific matters within them. I think the submission you have just heard from Councillor Kelly, also of Falkirk Council, is maybe indicative of other submissions that you may hear from elected representatives and representatives of the community on issues of local ties. So I do not intend to dwell greatly on the issue of local ties.

As you have already said, the council's principal submission here is that the

existing constituencies should be maintained. That is notwithstanding the subsidiary submissions which we have made in relation to names. Our principal submission very much remains that the constituencies should be retained as they are. And the principal reason for that you have already referred to, which is that the two existing constituencies fit very well with the electoral quota and can be accommodated within the local authority boundaries. They are long established constituencies, they have broadly been in place since 1983, since the UK election of that year, and because of that the electorate well understands the constituencies of Falkirk East and Falkirk West and are familiar with them as entities and their boundaries. And I think all in this room will be aware there is a rich political history in these two constituencies which has helped to establish the identity of those two constituencies in the minds of the electorate.

I think in contrast it can be said that the revised proposals, and we know what those are, they have already been described, do not reflect well understood boundaries on the part of the electorate. And I think that is particularly striking in relation to the addition of the parts of Denny and Banknock ward to Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. There is no historic connection between Denny and Kilsyth ... sorry, I should say there is a historic connection between Denny and Kilsyth as both are admittedly within the county of Stirlingshire and that was reflected in historic constituency boundaries in the past. But those are really matters of memory now. We are talking about constituencies which have been in place since 1983 and for current electors the memory of shared boundaries with Stirlingshire will be something of the past. And also for current electors, as Councillor Kelly has said, provision of local services has all been on a Falkirk or Forth Valley basis and that helps to reinforce the sense of connection with the current constituencies.

I think likewise for the Linlithgow additions to the proposed Falkirk South constituencies, there are few obvious ties between the eastern part of the Falkirk Council area and Linlithgow, save for again some historic county connections in that the Bo'ness ward was part of the same county as Linlithgow and there is some geographical proximity between Bo'ness and Linlithgow at least, but broadly there is not a close connection between the Falkirk East area and the West Lothian/Edinburgh.

Madam Chair, you have already referred, and I think very helpfully for the purpose of those attending the inquiry, to the various rules under which the Boundaries Scotland require to operate. I think everyone accepts and understands that there are difficult balances to be made when trying to address the two factors of equality of votes between seats so far as possible and maintaining local ties and the local authority boundaries. But the council's submission in this is that it is significant that the manner in which schedule 1 to the Scotland Act is drafted and in particular to paragraph 12 of that schedule. It makes the first rule, so rule 1, which must be had regard to, is that local authority boundaries are the first factor which must be taken into account. And when one goes on to look further down into the rules, and particularly subparagraph (2) of rule 2 that the Boundaries Scotland may depart from the strict application of the rule if it is desirable to avoid excessive disparity in numbers, the starting point I think clearly from that structure is that the local authority boundaries have a key importance in the way in which the rules are drafted.

I think that perhaps raises the question of why, why would rule 1 be local authority boundaries? Well, there is I suppose the obvious issue of the understanding and knowledge of electors because they already live within the local authority boundary, so constituencies which can be accommodated within the local authority boundary will be more familiar and cause less chance of voter confusion. Beyond that though, I think there is the fact that elections are run not by councils, admittedly, but by returning officers. Returning officers are appointed by each local authority and their election teams flow from their appointment as returning officer. And this I think takes me to one of the points which you have already referred to as one of the reasons for the council's objection, which is the operational risk of running an election across three different local authority areas. So essentially for the Falkirk Council area there will be three local authorities involved in that. Admittedly there are common rules across all of the constituencies which all returning officers will comply with, but there are local arrangements too which emerge in the way in which each local authority operates its election and those give rise to the potential for confusion in the way that they are operated across the local authority boundaries. The council has experience of this already. We will make it work if it needs to happen, but I think it is important to observe that Falkirk is already split in three different directions already for the purpose of the UK constituencies, but across three different local authorities than would be proposed. The election arrangements are currently shared with West Lothian and Clackmannanshire Council, so far as the UK election is concerned.

If the current proposals from Boundaries Scotland are adopted for the purpose of the Scottish Parliament, we would be sharing the electoral arrangements with West Lothian, not with Clackmannanshire, but with North Lanarkshire Council. The Westminster boundaries take us across two electoral registration officers for Central Scotland and also for Lothian. The current Boundaries Scotland proposals for the Scottish Parliamentary constituencies will take us into three. So we will have Lanarkshire for the purpose of the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency, we will have Central Scotland and also Lothian again in relation to West Lothian.

If I might maybe just give an example of where voter confusion can arise and where differences in approach can arise because of these cross-boundary constituencies, I think many in the room will be familiar with some of the concerns and controversies which arose in relation to the availability of postal votes in advance of the recent UK general election. The difficulty was that they were arriving a bit later than anticipated and when many people were leaving to go on summer holidays due to the date which had been chosen for the general election. The significance of that is that there was only an opportunity very late in the day for returning officers to issue a replacement postal pack to voters who were going on holiday. And I think many people may have seen publicity about some local authorities which opened on a Saturday specifically to allow for the issue of postal votes. Very noticeably, Edinburgh City Council did that in relation to its constituencies. The returning officer in Falkirk did the same thing on the same Saturday but the returning officers and election offices in West Lothian and Clackmannanshire did not open to do the same thing. So had they done so we could have issued postal vote replacement packs from our offices in Falkirk, but we couldn't. Unsurprisingly, many voters attended at the office who were not in the constituency wholly within the Falkirk council area. Many of them were in the Alloa and Grangemouth constituency, where the returning officer is in Clackmannanshire Council but lived within the Falkirk council area, and were

unsurprisingly concerned that they could attend at the Falkirk Council office and find that though they lived in Falkirk they could not be issued with a postal vote. I give that as a very practical example of where confusion and distinction between the operation of processes can arise on cross-boundary constituencies. So I make that point just to suggest that this is not a fanciful or academic point that is made in the council's submission.

I say again that overall it is accepted that this is a difficult set of choices that Boundaries Scotland have to make. I think the explanation is very helpful to be given that these were concerns arising both in the west and in the east of the Falkirk Council area, and I think it is not the role of an organisation such as Falkirk Council to comment on the particular arrangements in other constituencies. I think in a factual point though it can be said that if one of the concerns which has led to this is a lack of local ties between West Lothian and west Edinburgh, I think it can be said that there are certainly more organisational connections between West Lothian and Edinburgh than there are between West Lothian and Falkirk. West Lothian and Edinburgh for instance are former authorities within the Lothian region, they share the same health board, they share the same electoral registration officer, as a significant factor in electoral organisation. So for all these factors, and for those set out in the council's report to the executive and in its letter of objection, the council's position is that the current constituencies and the previous unrevised proposals originally made by Boundaries Scotland should be retained as a Falkirk East and a Falkirk West constituency. In the event that that is not the outcome of Boundaries Scotland's subsequent consideration, the council has some concerns about the naming of the revised proposed constituencies. I think Cumbernauld and Kilsyth is particularly problematic to retain as it is, and I think few if any of the residents within Denny and Banknock would anticipate that they would live in a constituency called Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, and some change would need to be made to reflect that change to the constituency boundary; whether that was to add a reference to Falkirk West or to Denny and Banknock is really a matter for Boundaries Scotland. The Falkirk South and Falkirk North references within the other two proposed constituencies are identical to the names of existing Falkirk council wards for the north part of Falkirk town and the south part of Falkirk town so there is considerable scope, I think, for voter confusion in those. I think it is maybe a matter of impression but if one looks at the population centres within the proposed constituencies they do not necessarily align on a north and south axis; I think they may be more easily be seen in an east and a west axis. That is all I think I propose to say in relation to names and I would simply conclude, Madam Chair, by asking you to take careful account of the council's submissions (as I have no doubt you will), and in due course to ask Boundaries Scotland to do the same thing. Thank you very much.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Thank you very much indeed. Now, the next name that I have on the list is Cecil Meiklejohn. Do we have ... Thank you.

CECIL MEIKLEJOHN: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am Councillor Cecil Meiklejohn, I am leader of Falkirk Council, and I just want to speak to add support to particularly what Mr Moodie has just presented, and certainly the feelings of all the elected members on Falkirk Council. As you outlined in your opening remarks this is the second round of the consultation, and the first round made no change to the Scottish Parliamentary boundaries for the constituencies of Falkirk East and West. What is now being proposed has been quite significant change, and has come as

quite a surprise and raised many concerns. I also note that neighbouring constituencies for Stirling and Clackmannanshire have been proposed for minimal change and you would therefore feel that there is an imbalance there that Falkirk is experiencing. It was helpful for you to outline the criteria and to help and understand the decision process of the Boundary Commission, but I do feel that has been very subjectively applied within Falkirk's case and we want to ask that that be revisited. Having taken the evidence, particularly from today, it very much feels that in order to address the issues of the other representations from other areas, Falkirk has been squeezed in the middle of Scotland, or the central belt in particular, with no acknowledgement of the community links and the boundaries, and not the proper application of the rules. Falkirk Council, due to its size and geography, worked well as two discrete units of Falkirk East and Falkirk West, and have been well established, voters clearly knowing which constituency and which MSP they are able to identify with. The proposal is now to split Falkirk across three constituencies. Falkirk Council has an established relationship with West Lothian Council, and there are some links already there because of the boundaries that exist within Falkirk East, that voters are comfortable with and know. We do work very closely with West Lothian Council, and to add a further local authority will undoubtedly bring organisational challenge as well as voter confusion. And I think Mr Moodie very well outlined the organisational challenge from the perspective of the returning officer.

The communities of Denny and Banknock are affected the most, as they are proposed to be placed within Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, which they do not have any natural ties or links with. They would be in the periphery of the constituency. It is the local authority of North Lanarkshire, and would introduce a further cross-boundary arrangement. Mr Kelly has detailed an awful lot from the existing area just around those very much personal links with all the services that would then be under confusion with being a part of a parliamentary constituency. Mr Moodie detailed a recent experience that we have had with the Westminster changes following the redrawing of those boundaries, where voters living in Grangemouth, Stenhousemuir and Larbert were within the Alloa and Grangemouth constituency, and despite that being the larger populated part of the constituency it was managed by Clackmannanshire Council. The issues emerged due to the timing of the election in relation to postal votes, and residents could not understand why they could not contact Falkirk Council to deal with the issues they had, to get replacement papers, but having to deal with Clackmannanshire Council, many choosing to not vote, and that is a disenfranchisement of the democratic process, it is something we all should strive try to continue to maintain and extend. It marginalises voters from that.

The use of the motorway as a boundary appears to be nonsensical, as it has split the council ward three or Denny and Banknock, and this will undoubtedly bring the confusion that is already expected. I attended a meeting earlier this week where voters are already thinking that services will change as a result of this, and there will be a significant amount of work to give them reassurance that they will still be able to maintain the services they have got from Falkirk Council. It loses the identity of the area because Denny and Banknock is not reflected in the name of the constituency, and not acknowledging that that is a community, and therefore they will feel very much on the periphery and very much marginalised. Linlithgow and Falkirk is not so much of an issue, as they do have some links there; however, there are a number of concerns around the change to the boundaries there and to what that might bring by way of change in representations.

There are a number of practicalities that would be involved, more with the organisation, which Mr Moodie has experienced. And the complexity of Falkirk Council having to deal with two local authorities and two other joint valuation boards, not to mention the perspective of the elected representatives of the area having to deal with more than one council, councillors from other local authorities, more than one health board, increased workload and the likely staffing implications by MSPs. I am also not aware of any other local authority that is in the position that Falkirk finds itself in, and just to highlight that these additional resources that would be required in servicing across such a complex boundary system, most of that comes from the public purse. Finally, as has been mentioned, the names of the constituencies, which has already been highlighted, the lack of Denny and Banknock within the Cumbernauld Kilsyth constituency, which reflects on the add-on nature to the area, which has no links or synergies with the rest of the constituency. Falkirk North and Linlithgow and Falkirk South both have the names of the council wards and have the potential to cause further confusion, particularly as Falkirk South geographically is not necessarily seen as south of the constituency. I would therefore ask the Boundary Commission to give further consideration to leaving Falkirk within the existing two constituencies of Falkirk East and Falkirk West, and I would also highlight that it is not very often that all councillors on Falkirk Council are in agreement, but there is a unanimous view on this. And we have asked that the Commission would consider the depth of the feeling around these proposals and that this matter be acted on to preserve the locality in the area of Falkirk, and so that its identity is not lost and we can continue to represent all of our constituents and encourage them to take part in the democratic process. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Thank you very much indeed. The next name on my list is James Kerr, who is Falkirk councillor for the Lower Braes. Do we have Mr Kerr?

FEMALE VOICE: He was here but I think he has left.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: The next name I have is an Anne Benton.

INAUDIBLE DISCUSSIONS REGARDING BANKNOCK AND ITS POSITION ON THE MAPS ON DISPLAY AT THE LOCAL INQUIRY

ANNE BENTON: Right, good afternoon. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to speak here today. I had not actually prepared because I did not know I had done all that, but I will give my tuppence worth anyway, thank you. Could I start by reading out a definition please, of consultation? It says, in the dictionary I looked at it said, "The act of exchanging information and opinions about something in order to reach a better understanding of it or to make a decision, or a meeting for this purpose." Now, I am not very sure what consultation was held in Banknock, with the people who going to be -- or colleagues in Linlithgow, who they're speaking to earlier. I've no idea if there were any meetings held, because I did not know anything about this until just a few months back when it was brought to my attention by a member of Falkirk Council -- thank you, Councillor Kelly. So I just wondered if you could maybe look up and look back into the archives and tell me what consultation you did that the people could be impacted by any proposed change, if it was confirmed it was to happen. So on that happy note, interesting to hear the conversations again that the Boundaries Commission may depart from the different decision that had been made and the

provisional plans, and then there is mention then from yourself about conflicting rules. Well, yes, I think there are conflicting rules, so I would like to propose that the conflicting rules are debated further so that we can get to some rules that are absolutely meaningful rather than meaningless, but that's a personal opinion from me.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, I think that one of the things I will make clear is that the rules are derived from legislation. So the rules themselves cannot be debated in this forum.

ANNE BENTON: No.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: If that was to be the case, that is a matter for the Scottish Parliament to take forward if it is felt that the rules are not in themselves correct. It is the application of the rules that we are really looking at in this room.

ANNE BENTON: Could I say something about that, because what you read out at the beginning was absolutely fantastic, and if people -- I do not know about other people, but if I had seen that before I came here -- there are a lot of questions that I have written down that appear to have been answered, that there will be -- is it a guarantee there will be no changes to local services at any time should the move from Banknock be made towards Kilsyth and Cumbernauld? Did I hear you say that?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, that is correct, though what I think has to be clear is what the purpose of these boundary changes are. It is purely to define the constituencies for the purposes of the elections to the Scottish Parliament.

ANNE BENTON: Okay.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Now, can I make clear what my role is here. It is not necessarily to answer questions that are really directed at Boundaries Scotland, because I am chairing the meeting and I am not part of Boundaries Scotland. So what I am is the chair.

ANNE BENTON: Yes. I am feeding through you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes. But obviously, plenty of people from Boundaries Scotland are here and obviously listening to what you are saying, and it will all be transcribed and taken into account by me in providing what is effectively an independent report to Boundaries Scotland, standing what everybody's submissions are.

ANNE BENTON: Okay.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: But I think it is important to know what my role is within this, and I cannot actually answer questions about certain aspects which may or may not be matters for the various councils involved and for others, rather than myself. But what I said, and what is absolutely correct, is that people should understand that this is not to do with services, it is not to do with council tax, it is not to do with where you go to school, it is not to do with health service provision. It is to do entirely with where you vote and who would represent you in the Scottish Parliament in the event that these boundary changes took place.

ANNE BENTON: So, can I ask somebody from Boundaries Scotland -- are you allowed to speak and answer any concerns I have at this point in time, yourself?

KIRSTY MAVOR: I am from Boundaries Scotland. The purpose of today is very much to listen. I am not a decision maker, I am the Secretary to Boundaries Scotland. The information you provide here today will be passed to the Commission to help them make their decisions.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: If I did not make it clear at the outset, that was part of the opening statement: to make clear the context of today's proceedings. Now there has been, obviously, discussion, there has been a lot of material published and publicly available about what is proposed, and we are quite far down the line in terms of the various proposals and the various discussions that have taken place. All of that is publicly available I think, and I think it is fair to say that it can be accessed if you wish to do so.

However, today is very much an opportunity for the views of individuals and organisations to be heard by the Boundaries Commission, because that is the whole point of it. This is what the consultation is really about. If there are views which have not thus far been made known to Boundaries Scotland, then this is the opportunity for people to make those views known and to make their concerns known. A number of individuals, councils, councillors and political parties have put forward written submissions about their objections; again, all of that will be taken into account very fully and will be referred to in my report. So there has been an ongoing conversation about all of this, but this is really the opportunity for individuals such as yourself and everyone else who has spoken today to articulate, and for me to note what has been said. And that can be assessed, and then I will make a report to Boundaries Scotland.

ANNE BENTON: Okay, thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Okay?

ANNE BENTON: Thank you. I will, however, just say it is disappointing that I thought I was coming here to get more information about things that haven't yet been communicated to me. I did not know about this at all, I know it started way back in 2022, I think there was a news report went out in the Edinburgh News or Edinburgh press or something, but actually did not reach Banknock until as I say Councillor Kelly shared stuff and it was on the news because Falkirk Council had objected. So I am still making the point that consultation should mean consultation, and it has not happened in this case, and that for me is a major...

Besides that, honestly, you did answer a lot of the things I had written down, I just wanted some other questions as well. What is the cost to taxpayers to administer boundary changes? So I am not going to get an answer, I know that, but I'm leaving that one with you too. What will it cost if you decide to move part of a small village - we are a village -- and you are hiving off one of our limbs to move it to --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, I think it is important for me to explain that this is not an option for Boundaries Scotland to look at. There has to be a continuing review of constituencies because it is acknowledged -- and I do not think it is controversial at all that the population moves within Scotland, so it moves within the constituency, it moves outwith the constituency. And in order that some

constituencies do not have a small number of people voting and still have the same say, it is to ensure that everyone across Scotland has the appropriate representation. So it is important that constituencies broadly have the same number of electors within them, so that there is not disparity in terms of representation in the Scottish Parliament. I do not think that is controversial; that approach has been taken both in Westminster and here.

ANNE BENTON: Yes, well it is... Yes, thank you. It is good to know that all our MSPs will be working equally as hard as each other, then, because they will have the same number of constituents.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, I think one of the hopes is that some do not have an unfair burden insofar as they may have 70-80,000 constituents and others maybe have 30,000. So that is why the figure is set in the way that I explained at the outset and how it is arrived at, where you have a figure broadly of about 59,900, give or take about ten percent.

ANNE BENTON: Yes. Okay. So I think I can only concur with what people have said, Councillor Kelly and our Council Leader here, about the loss to the identity of the community of Banknock. People who have been out there forty-odd years, been involved in all sort of daily forums and local councils, playgroups, PT, the whole bit, I've done my bit for the area, I continue to do that by supporting it and coming here today to try and keep us together, and all can do is say: please see sense and keep us together as a small community. I think not only we do not have ties to places like Cumbernauld, we do not even have a bus that would go to Cumbernauld. To walk up from Banknock to the main road, there is no bus to Cumbernauld, so how elderly people or older people -- I know you are saying that council services might not change, but we'll have to wait and see if that happens or not. But I live in a state of disbelief that there is much to be gained by doing that and separating us from the rest of our people. I think Councillor Kelly again said we were Banknock, BHL, we had the badges; we had the symbolism, the logos, all over the place. And I was going to say something about "better together", but I thought I had better not mention that. Okay. But I just think -- yes, let us keep us together, please. I am not going to say anything else, because a lot of the things, as I say, was in what you read out the beginning. And I would love to get a copy of that, is that possible and feasible?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, that will be made available.

ANNE BENTON: Fabulous, thank you. Sorry, I'm directing everything at you --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Absolutely no problem, it is what I am here for.

ANNE BENTON: But yes, I think that is about all I want to... Just keep me posted; if there's any more debates to be had or any more consultation, count me in. I am available. So, thank you very much.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Thank you very much for your contribution, thank you.

ANNE BENTON: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Thank you very much. Now, is James Kerr back in the room? He must have had to go. If anyone sees him come back in then, perhaps you

could let him know that his chance is up; he will be called next. The next name I have is Catriona Clark. No? And then Euan Stainbank MP. Yes, Mr Stainbank, I see you there.

EUAN STAINBANK MP: Want me to begin?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

EUAN STAINBANK MP: Thank you, chair. Euan Stainbank, Member of Parliament for Falkirk. I was a councillor for the Falkirk South ward from May 2022 to August 2024, which is the primary capacity in which I am commenting on as I contribute to the Boundary Commission consultation on that basis. In principle I am in agreement with the objection that Falkirk Council have put forward in the report on 14 May and endorsed the positions articulated by the council leader and the Chief Governance Officer today. Also I endorse the additional objections that were added to this by Councillor Kelly which is taking into consideration the acute impact this will have on Banknock, Haggs and Longcroft ----

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I am going to ask you to slow down a wee bit ---

EUAN STAINBANK: Yeah, no worries. Aye, it's not the first time I have heard that.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I can't actually make out what you're saying so just go a wee bit more slowly please.

EUAN STAINBANK: That's fine. I endorse the additional objections added to this by Councillor Kelly which is taking into consideration the acute impact this will have on Banknock, Haggs, Longcroft and the other areas within ward 3. These concerns were manifested in a council amendment to the report on 14 May meaning that Falkirk Council adopt an additional reserve position. It recognises these acute concerns. This was proposed by myself locking with local member Councillor Kelly for the meeting on 14 May but was ultimately not approved by the majority of councillors on the council executive.

I think rather than challenging the proposals directly as has been done today, the primary question we should be asking the people of Falkirk, West and East, or rightly asking is why this was changed from the initial status quo proposal. Thank you, Chair, for the articulations, the reasons for the rationale. I understand from this, this to be quite reactive to objections elsewhere. You will find it unsurprising that I attach lesser weight when these are coming at the organisational, logistical and democratic detriment to the people of Falkirk.

One thing that wasn't noted, I think, in as much detail as it should have been, was national population shifts. The growth of population is higher in West Lothian and lower in North Lanarkshire but is substantial further east to our boundaries with the authorities of Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian. This is raising the question of why Falkirk is being subdivided, on the face of it to settle boundary concerns from one or two local authorities and it raises the additional question of whether the census results were taken into account in the initial proposals or just in the second proposals or at all. I think I echo the concerns raised around the names. It incorporates parts of Falkirk council's ward boundaries, the name of a Falkirk council boundary, Falkirk South, which is not even within the correspondingly

named constituency causing the prospect of miscommunication and I think this needs to be altered to reflect this.

This is not an academic concern. Alloa and Grangemouth has already suffered from people in Larbert, Carronshore and Stenhousemuir having a confused idea of who their elected representatives are moving out of the Falkirk UK constituency and into a new constituency which does not explicitly or indicatively refer to who is representing them. I think that this is key because it undermines their accountability and accessibility of the elected representatives. I am just looking ----

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: What you are saying is actually really important and it probably has been picked up for the transcript but I think it is important that people hear all of what you are saying. It is actually really important and impactful and if you want to get your message across, then it is really important that you slow down so that I can hear you and everyone else can hear you.

EUAN STAINBANK: I am sorry. Just moving to the relevant factors, the Boundaries Commission have to take into account that I find to be relevant in this case is taking into account local authority areas, maintenance of local ties and inconvenience caused by the alteration of existing boundaries. These constituencies are across three different local authority areas as the initial proposals --- well, the initial proposals had as within the Falkirk Council area which is appropriately sized for and traditionally been across two Scottish Parliamentary constituencies. There are concerns raised in the 14 May report showing minimal historical working with Lanarkshire VJB. I'm not sure if this has been taken into account so far but I would also note from the Linlithgow and Falkirk South proposed constituency, Grangemouth, which is currently of national, economic and policy interest to everyone. Primary delivery of Scottish and UK government delivery at a local level has been done through partnering with Falkirk Council and this constituency may be diluted and confused by this division and a sharing with another major population centre outside of the Falkirk council area.

Turning to local ties, this is in the context of relatively low population growth in Falkirk, North Lanarkshire and, to a lesser extent, West Lothian from the 2022 census. The surrounding population has been lower to the west and higher to the east in Midlothian and Edinburgh; however, the constituencies are being allocated population centres primarily to the west which, on the face of it, looks less like a coherent shift and more like Falkirk compensating other areas, perhaps, as was articulated, to limit the sprawl of Glasgow constituencies into North Lanarkshire and Edinburgh into West Lothian.

The division of Denny, Long Head, Longcroft, Haggs and Allandale from Banknock, Dunipace and Denny in ward 3, this is not an appropriate division with local ties not being taken into account under these proposed boundaries. As Councillor Kelly said, go down a street in Banknock and ask people if it's easier to get to Falkirk or to Cumbernauld. Even more granularly, there are ties to public services, council, NHS and public transport with Denny and Bonnybridge from communities across the boundary line between Falkirk North and the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth proposed constituencies. This creates concerns I have around the accountability.

Turning to the inconvenience of this alteration, I think there's been a lack of cognisance taken into the fact that we have recently had the UK boundary change across the Falkirk area as well with Alloa and Grangemouth, Falkirk, and Bathgate

and Linlithgow all being new constituencies. There is already substantial voter and constituent confusion as was articulated in the election by Councillor Meiklejohn and Mr Moodie but there has also been subsequent voter confusion, especially from the Larbert and Stenhousemuir areas, that will have two constituencies altered for both the Scotland and United Kingdom area unsure of who is representing them and that turns to the point about accountability and accessibility.

Also turning to the 14 May report an entirely new form of VJB co-working. The Falkirk council reported in detail on 14 May and I don't believe the issues will be satisfied by the proposals coming forward.

Overall, I think there has been inadequate local circumstances taken into account and there is a lack of a sufficient rationale for this to be accepted by the representatives of the people of Falkirk; thank you very much, Chair.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Thank you very much indeed, thank you. Is Helen Hancock here?

HELEN HANCOCK: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Thank you very much.

HELEN HANCOCK: I am just going to say something very, very briefly because everybody has expressed exactly what I think so far, you know, so I am going to read, whatever the word is, or go in, alongside Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. That just, as we have all said, does not make sense. Banknock, Haggs, Longcroft is a unit, it's a community, we stand together, so to divide us up is --- I don't know what the word is but it's not really what I want to happen and it's just a shame there wasn't many people here because they probably didn't know about it as Anne has already mentioned and I've got another two things for the Boundaries Commission or the Boundary Commission. What happens if there is no change? That's just one question and the second one is could the Boundary Commission not change MSP's remit so instead of being governed by, say, a figure of 75,000 per capita, whatever you call it, if they've got 85, they get an assistant pro rata for ten hours a week or whatever it is; you know, that's just off the top of my head and that's really all I've got to say, thank you, Madam Chair.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Thank you very much indeed. Next on my list is Michael Matheson MSP.

MICHAEL MATHESON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon everyone, I'm Michael Matheson MSP and I served the constituency since 2007 where I've been an MSP for the area since 1999, first as a regional MSP before becoming the MSP for Falkirk West. This of course is not the first proposed change to the Falkirk West Scottish Parliamentary constituency. The previous Boundary Commission review of the constituency proposed to make a change to its name, to move it from Falkirk West to West Falkirk which I objected to on the basis of the several hundred pounds that it would cost for a new sign above my office with no discernible benefit to constituents and, rightly so, the Boundary Commission saw the wisdom of that and chose to retain the name of Falkirk West.

Madam Chair, I believe that the initial proposals that were set out by the Boundary Commission were the correct proposals for both Falkirk West and Falkirk East. My

remarks are primarily though for those within my constituency within Falkirk West. I think as Colin Moodie very fully set out, the Falkirk West constituency meets the quota set out by the Boundary Commission very well and also it meets the criteria for establishing constituencies very well. I believe, Madam Chair, the issue that we are debating or discussing here today is an imported issue from outwith the Falkirk area. It was clear I think from your ----

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Did you say imported?

MICHAEL MATTHESON: Imported, yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Not "important"? It is an imported issue?

MICHAEL MATTHESON: Yes, an imported issue. I think it is clear from your own earlier summary that the Boundary Commission have met with challenges in the west of Edinburgh and also in the Clydebank area and in order to try and resolve those issues have decided that the way in which to achieve that issue being resolved would be to make changes to Falkirk West and Falkirk East in a way which I believe is unacceptable and I wish to go through a number of points on why I believe that the proposals from the Boundary Commission are not the correct approach.

Some have already alluded to this in their own comments but it is becoming increasingly complex for the electorate to navigate the various politicians representing their communities in different settings. We have proportional representation for local government with multi-member wards. We have the Scottish Parliament constituency MSPs and we also have regional MSPs and of course we also have MPs at Westminster. From my experience over the course of the last 25 years as an elected member from constituents it is clear that at times they do find it confusing who exactly represents what on a particular issue and I believe that actually it's important that we try to simplify the process of electoral representation as best we can in order to ensure that the electorate feel that they have accountability over the elected members.

Now, whilst I recognise that the different electoral systems that we use in both the local government, Westminster and Scottish Parliament are not a matter for the Boundary Commission in themselves, there is the reality of what the electorate often have to deal with and I believe that the revised proposals that have been brought forward for the Falkirk West constituency have the danger of making it even more complex for constituents in the Banknock, Haggs, Longcroft and the Denny and Dunipace areas.

I am also particularly concerned that proposals, in my view, take very little account of the historical links within these areas of Denny, Dunipace, Haggs and Banknock. Many of the organisations that will provide statutory services within these areas such as a health board, the local authority or the police are all organisations which are, by and large, Falkirk based or Falkirk facing organisations and for many in these areas, they will be dependent upon these organisations to meet their needs as and when they require them. Sometimes when these organisations don't get it right and when they don't feel that their needs are being met, they will approach their elected representatives in order to make representation to them and a key part of doing my job and serving constituents well is having good connections to organisations such as the local authority, the health board and other bodies such as the police in order to engage directly with them to make representations.

Part of the challenge you have as an elected representative, for example, if the changes in Banknock were to go ahead, an MSP who is predominantly dealing with North Lanarkshire Council and Lanarkshire health board, will probably have strong links with them but it becomes more difficult to have the same links with Falkirk based organisations when they only cover a very small part of your constituency. I do not say this as a slight on who the representative in 2026 will be for the Cumbernauld seat, I am sure they will serve their constituents to the best of their ability, but it is the reality of the fact that in order to serve your constituents as well as you can, having good strong relationships with the statutory bodies is extremely important.

I believe that the historical links in these areas go beyond that of the statutory agencies and the complexity that goes with some of that as was set out by Colin Moodie. Many of the voluntary and community based organisations in areas such as Banknock, Haggs, Denny and Dunipace will have natural links to organisations and communities within their area but it is not unusual for community based organisations in the Denny and Dunipace areas to have very strong links to Bonnybridge and out to Longcroft and to the Haggs and to Banknock. Likewise, it is not unusual for community based organisations in Banknock, Haggs and Longcroft and Denny and Dunipace to have very strong links into Falkirk. I can think of a number of community based organisations in these areas that serve beyond the immediate area in which they operate but it is all by and large into the Falkirk area. I think it becomes increasingly difficult to explain to community based organisations in these areas why they would then be forced into a Parliamentary constituency that was titled Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. Even by adding the name Denny and Dunipace onto the constituency name, in my view, will make no sense to those who work and support the community in these areas.

So I think, Chair, my principal point here is that the division which has been created here by the Boundary Commission is a division which is based upon, by and large, the motorway cutting through Denny and Banknock. Communities are not defined by physical boundaries such as motorways. The community engagement that goes on within Banknock, Denny and Dunipace areas goes way beyond that of the motorway. In fact they reach beyond the motorway in itself and unfortunately I think the Boundary Commission have taken the wrong approach here in looking at the motorway as simply being a boundary in which to draw a line across, irrespective of the historical community ties and ongoing community ties that are within these areas.

On that basis, I believe that the Boundary Commission have come to the wrong decision. It is, therefore, my view, Chair, that I believe the Boundary Commission should return to the original proposals as was set out by the Boundary Commission in retaining the existing boundary of Falkirk West and of course also of Falkirk East in doing so. If there are challenges because of population changes in other parts of the country, then I understand that the Boundary Commission may have to take action in order to do so but what they should not do is import the problem to here in Falkirk and then to expect to divide communities within Falkirk West in particular in trying to resolve a problem elsewhere in other parts of the constituency boundary revision and I hope that the Boundary Commission will take proper recognition of the concerns which have been set out by Falkirk Council, by the local community and the elected members here today and recognise the strength of opposition that there is within the Falkirk area to the proposed boundary changes. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Can I just ask one question that arises and I suppose you are in the unique position of having to maybe deal with this. You talked about the MSP --- and I suppose an MP as well would be in the same situation but the MSP for the purposes of today, you have to have strong links with the statutory bodies or the local authorities, the health service and the police as an example, but if you resolve an issue, say you have a constituent coming to you with an issue that may affect that particular constituent but also may have wider implications for all your constituents, so there might be an issue that affects the whole constituency but only one particular individual has brought this matter to your attention, as an MSP what duty do you feel to ensure parity for all of your constituencies --- you may deal with the problem for that one individual but that problem may affect others within the constituency, so do you then try and ensure that there is an equality of treatment for all the constituents and if that is the case, would that require someone like yourself as an MSP to go to the different areas, the different local authorities to ensure parity and equality for all constituents?

MICHAEL MATTHESON: So I'm sure all elected members would always try to make sure that they represent constituents to the best of their ability when you raise an issue with them but let me just give you a practical example of the way in which as an elected representative I engage with statutory bodies at the present time. So one of the major issues that constituents will often raise with you is access to health services.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

MICHAEL MATTESON: So NHS Forth Valley operate a regular briefing session for MSPs and MPs that represent their area on issues that they have within the health board, so financial issues, service issues, service change issues, so that they have advance notice of it and also provide them with briefings on exactly how they are going to try and address some of these issues. Very often in those meetings you will get an opportunity to question them, to challenge them, to then ensure that you understand the circumstances properly and very often when a constituent comes along to you and says, "Well, they're not providing X, Y and Z," you are able to say, "Well, actually I understand that the health board are doing X, Y and Z at the present moment," and either they are looking to reconfigure the service or they are looking to change the way in which the service is delivered in some way.

The challenge you will have, in my view, in putting Banknock and Denny and Dunipace into --- what is a small part into a bigger constituency is that it is a bigger constituency that is dominated by NHS Lanarkshire and North Lanarkshire Council and the reality is that you will spend less time engaging with the parts of your constituency, of a smaller part of the population because the demand from that area is going to be lower by and large, so you end up having predominantly most of your engagement, purely because of the timing constraints that you have, going to meetings with, I don't know, the North Lanarkshire health board or --- sorry, if Lanarkshire health board have these types of regular meetings but if they do, you will probably spend most of your time going to the Lanarkshire health board meetings rather than the Forth Valley health board meetings because the majority of the case work you will get will come from Lanarkshire health board area, so you will become much better informed, you will make much better representations, in my view, to NHS Lanarkshire and, when it comes to making representations in

Parliament, you will be better informed about what NHS Lanarkshire is doing than you would necessarily be about what is happening within NHS Forth Valley.

Whereas, in my view, I am in a position where I can review with NHS Forth Valley so I have a good insight and a good understanding on exactly what the challenges are and what their plans are going forward and I have a good relationship and my constituency office staff have a good relationship with the staff in areas such as patient relations in trying to get matters resolved for constituents. Sometimes it's not about a formal letter. Sometimes in my office it's a case of picking up the phone and speaking to someone within the health board at a decision making level to get an issue resolved. But if you are --- if the bulk of your constituents by a significant amount come from a different health board area you will not have the same relationship and you will not have the time and opportunity to build up the relations that are necessary in order to try to represent your constituents as well as you can.

Equally, it is the same within the council. For example, when it comes to council issues, we have traditionally you would make representations to the Chief Executive but over recent years, because of relationships that we have got with senior members of staff in the council, very often my constituency office will go directly to senior council officials in Falkirk Council and raise an issue with them to ask them to try and deal with it urgently. If you only have a small part of your constituency covered by Falkirk council and the majority of it is with North Lanarkshire council, the likelihood is that you are not going to be able to build up those relationships in the same way which will allow you to be able to make representations for the constituents as quickly and as readily as I believe we can with the existing constituency boundaries.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Would it be fair, to summarise effectively what you are saying is that there might be a fear --- I am putting this to you, and you can disagree obviously, there might be a fear of a dilution of the effectiveness of the MSP if they have to spread their time between different ----

MICHAEL MATTHESON: I think it is more than a fear. I think it is a reality of potentially what will happen here. I say that on the basis also of my experience of being a regional MSP. When I was first elected as a regional MSP my constituency went from Falkirk East down to Kilmarnock. The reality was that it was impossible to have relationships across all of those health boards when you were receiving representation from different constituents in different parts of the country and also with the local authority in those areas. By and large, you could build up relationships in one of the council areas in a way that I thought was actually meaningful and helpful to constituents. So I do think it will lead to a dilution in the quality of representation. I do not say that on the basis as a slight against the elected representative but ----

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Not the individuals but just the time ----

MICHAEL MATTHESON: --- but I think from a practical point of view that is the reality of what I think will happen and I think that it will become quite marked in the Banknock and the Denny and Dunipace area because it will be a small part of a much greater constituency where the vast majority of the population will be in the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth areas and, as a result, it will dominate the case work of

the constituency office for the elected representative for that constituency if it goes ahead on the basis of the proposed boundary changes. Is that helpful?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Thank you, that is very helpful indeed, Mr Matheson. Next on the list is Anne Hannah.

ANNE HANNAH: Thank you. I have been suffering a bit with a cough so I hope I can get through this without coughing and spluttering at you all. Perhaps I can have some water just to be sure.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: You are the councillor for the Lower Braes ward.

ANNE HANNAH: I am, the councillor for the Lower Braes ward and the leader of the Labour group on Falkirk Council. I did provide a written report to the Boundary Commission on the views from the Labour group and you should have that in your pack but I will not just read out from that. I have the advantage or perhaps the disadvantage of following on from a number of other elected representatives who --- and from Colin Moodie who have very articulately stolen my thunder to some extent in terms of the things that I would say, so I would say, first and foremost, I was on that council and made that decision along with every other Labour, SNP, Conservative and independent councillor on the Falkirk Council. We all agreed with the submission made by Falkirk Council, we all agreed that this is not a good idea. As Councillor Meiklejohn said earlier on, we don't always all agree on something but you have total unanimity on this event.

Firstly, I would say that I want to talk about communities. Your rules do not say anything about communities but they do, however, talk about local ties and I think that communities are very, very important. The communities that people feel they belong to are very, very important and I think it is --- I am finding it extremely difficult to explain to people why it is that the original plan was to keep Falkirk East and Falkirk West as they were and then, because of concerns raised in Clydebank and Edinburgh, suddenly we have to change all that in Falkirk. That is a very, very difficult thing to explain to people out there in the Falkirk Council area. I find it rather difficult to understand myself. I recognise the difficult job that the Boundary Commission has to do in terms of fulfilling the remit it has but I think in this particular case, the way in which it has gone about it is entirely wrong. The original proposal to keep the two constituencies as they were, was right. Perhaps I and others should have responded to that original proposal and said that we agree with it. Perhaps if we had done that, those responses might have been taken into account in the second round, I don't know, but I think we have to look, first of all, at the communities. I think we have to look at the rules that the Boundary Commission is following.

Rule 1 says that the local authority area boundaries have to be taken into account. In the first look at the boundaries, the Boundary Commission did that. In this second look the, local authority area boundaries have been messed about with, ignored, so rule 1, I would suggest that the Boundary Commission is not following now in this proposal.

Rule 2 is about the quotas. Now, Falkirk East and Falkirk West came pretty close to matching the quotas for the numbers of constituents and, therefore, did not need to be messed about with; that would be my view.

Let us begin then to talk about the community issues. People do live in communities; people recognise bindings with their local people in their local communities and they do get confused when you begin to split those up. Any boundary necessarily has a degree of difficulty. I find it in my local ward; my local ward is Lower Braes and some of the people on the edges of Lower Braes do not know that they are in Lower Braes and not Upper Braes; that happens but they all know that they are part of the Falkirk council area. People understand council boundaries. People understand council services because they know --- when their bins don't get collected they know where to go, they know which school their children are going to, they know the local services that are provided by the council, so the Falkirk Council boundary and the local authority area boundaries are fundamental when you are looking at the other boundaries, in my opinion. You should be looking at those, first and foremost - and it is Rule 1 in your rule book - so I would suggest it should be considered very, very important and in this case I think it has not been properly considered.

The local ties are also particularly important. There has been reference by a number of other people to bus services. Far be it from me to say that our bus services within the Falkirk council area are brilliant, my constituents would not agree with me at all, but what bus services we do have come from the extremities of the Falkirk Council area into Falkirk. That is what --- even going from one part of the Falkirk Council area to the opposite corner of the Falkirk council area can be very difficult by bus service or if you start having people start --- having to make their links with West Lothian, with Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, it doesn't make sense to people.

During the 2024 general election I did some work in three of the constituencies that the Falkirk Council area is covered by and people in some of the areas became very confused. People in Stenhousemuir could not understand why they got leaflets for Alloa and Grangemouth because they said, "But we are part of Falkirk." People in Bo'ness didn't understand why they were getting leaflets from Linlithgow and Bathgate. That confusion is really, really important when it comes to voting. I know it is not the job of the Boundary Commission to consider whether there is a good turnout or not, but I think we should all be concerned about voter engagement, and voter engagement is going to be damaged in my view by confusion about who you're voting for, and what constituency, what area you're voting in and what the impact of that will be. I will not go over the many things that have been said before me. I would just simply say I agree with the issues about people having to deal with two different local authorities, having to deal with two different police areas, having to deal with two different health board areas. The position for MSPs was put forward very well by Michael Matheson, and so, not having been an MSP myself I will bow to his superior knowledge in that. Now, there's something you don't often hear from me.

So, I think we have to look at the realities of local ties and local communities. We have to look at what makes sense to people in those communities, and I don't think this makes sense.

Now, there might be a report that says, "Well, what are we then going to do about the problems in Clydebank and Edinburgh?" Well, I'm sorry, I am a councillor in the Falkirk Council area, and while I have every sympathy with the Boundaries Commissions difficulties in trying to make this all add up, it doesn't seem to me

that people in the Falkirk council are should be disadvantaged because of a problem of having constituencies of the right size in Clydebank and Edinburgh.

Now, you did a very good introduction to the afternoon, and one of the things you were talking about was the issue of a lack of ties between Linlithgow and Edinburgh. I used to work in the old Lothian region. The ties between Linlithgow and Edinburgh are far stronger than the ties between Linlithgow and Falkirk. You're talking about the same health board; you're talking about the same many other things. I think we need to look at communities, we need to look at local ties, and I ask the Boundary Commission to reconsider, to go back to the original proposal, which made a great deal of sense, and I apologise if that makes it difficult for you in terms of dealing with the Clydebank and Edinburgh issues, but I don't think people in Falkirk should be disadvantaged because of that.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Thank you, very much. I think those are all the people on my list who had put their names down to speak at this session. Is there anyone else who would like an opportunity to take the floor? Yes, please just come forward. Can I have your name, please?

MARGARET GRANT: Yes. My name's Margaret Grant and I'm a resident of Banknock. I don't represent anything other than myself and my neighbours and friends who are from Banknock, Haggs, Dunipace, Denny, all of where the families are all spread out. I've lived in Banknock for nearly 40 years and the only way that I found out about this was a friend, actually my sister-in-law who lives two streets away, and she came round panicking because one of her neighbours' daughters had told her there was a paragraph in the Daily Record that said that Banknock and Haggs and Longcroft were all moving into North Lanarkshire, and from that it became - we were going to have to go to doctors surgeries in Kilsyth, we were going to have to, you know - everything. We were going to have to go Monklands Hospital, we couldn't be seen in Forth Valley anymore. I mean, there was a whole panic. So, that went down her street, and she came round to me, and I then panicked it down my street, and everybody was panicking. I think Councillor Kelly there actually got an email from one of my neighbours, [REDACTED]. So, we were all in this --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Panic.

MARGARET GRANT: -- panic, but one of the things that kept coming up from everybody was - they were saying, "Well, where did this discussion happen in 2023?" There was no leaflets locally, there was nothing in the local Scotmid, there was nothing in the doctor's surgery, there was no consultation. The people of Banknock - I'm only speaking for Banknock - we didn't get any notice of this at all, and it was through the article that my sister-in-law brought round that told me that this meeting was happening today. So, I took it on myself, for my neighbours and said, "Look, I'm free on Thursday afternoon. I'll go along." So, that was part of it. One, I think, has been covered and something that came up from my neighbours when I was saying to them, and we'll need to go and vote in Kilsyth or Cumbernauld, and they all said, "Well, how are we getting there?" There's no buses, you know, if we don't have cars. A lot of the people in Banknock are elderly, they now don't drive, they're looking to buses, taxi's is out of the question for the price, and that was one of the things that came up. Someone also said to me about these numbers, has it been taken into consideration about the house building that's supposed to be going

to happen in Banknock over the next number of years? Hundreds of houses are going to be built, so does that help with how many people live in areas?

The other thing, the question there that came up for me when you mentioned police and local health boards - so if I live in Banknock - you'll probably not be able to answer this, but I'm going to put it, and you can put it forward, if I'm living in Banknock and something happens outside my house, do I call the Cumbernauld police or Kilsyth police, or do I call Falkirk police?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: You just phone the police.

MARGARET GRANT: I just phone the police?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

MARGARET GRANT: Right.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I'll reiterate this.

MARGARET GRANT: Right. The health board --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I will make this clear again so that we - if it is not already clear. All that this would do would change the area which would vote for the MSP.

MARGARET GRANT: Right. I probably got mixed up.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: So, it would not make any difference to where you get your services.

MARGARET GRANT: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: It would not make any difference to where you would go to the doctor, it would not make any difference to where you would, for example would go to the police. Police Scotland cover the whole area. You would phone the same number.

MARGARET GRANT: Right.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: And that would make no difference, but what would be different is the group of the electorate who are represented by the same MSP.

MARGARET GRANT: Right.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: It only affects the member elected to the Scottish Parliament.

MARGARET GRANT: Right. So, it's this ties thing - just the lady that spoke there last, said like Linlithgow and Edinburgh they're in the same board, and that kind of mixed me up a wee bit - it doesn't matter?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes. Your neighbours - and I think this is fair to say, and obviously a message that I think everyone wants to underline, I am sure Boundaries Scotland want to underline, this does not affect your access to services.

MARGARET GRANT: Right.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: That will remain the same.

MARGARET GRANT: But voting would change?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Ultimately --

MARGARET GRANT: We'd have to go to there to vote?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Not necessarily.

MARGARET GRANT: No.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: You would go to the same polling station. You personally would go to the same polling station, but the group of people who are represented by the same MSP would slightly change. So, for example - well, I think it is actually best shown - and if I get this wrong, please - because I am really a lay person explaining this --

MARGARET GRANT: No, I understand that.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: -- but I think it has to be clear for everybody --

MARGARET GRANT: I actually hadn't planned on speaking.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: -- and there are, obviously, a number of individuals, and I think this has - it has become clear, perhaps there is a degree of communication in the way in which - and that might be something that Boundaries Scotland could take away as a separate matter, but for the purposes of this meeting, what we are really talking about is getting input as to whether the boundaries changes impact in any particular way on individual communities and, obviously, this area here is one of concern, all right? (POINTS AT MAP OF CONSTITUENCIES) So, everybody who is in this pink area would be represented by the same MSP.

MARGARET GRANT: Okay.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: All right?

MARGARET GRANT: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: But that means that this area here is represented by the same MSP as the people in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth and that is, perhaps, a bit controversial.

MARGARET GRANT: Yes, right, got you now.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I think that is the concern.

MARGARET GRANT: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: But it does not make any difference to where you go to the doctor. Nothing is moving. Nobody - there is not going to be a wall being built or anything like that.

MARGARET GRANT: I think that is how people think.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: None of those things are going to happen. It simply means when it comes to an election into the Scottish Parliament, the same MSP will represent all of the people here, the same MSP will represent all the people in the green area, where the boundaries previously were different, as you can see. And the same - the blue people will all be represented, which goes down further, obviously, towards Edinburgh.

MARGARET GRANT: Yes. So, totally understand that. My point then from the voting, so, if that MSP here, so I'm voting here --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

MARGARET GRANT: -- where this MSP is.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

MARGARET GRANT: I think it was Mr Matheson that mentioned it, so, he is covering all this?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

MARGARET GRANT: But my life and all of my friends, family and all of them, their lives are here.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I think that is that point that I think is - you are trying to articulate that you feel stronger connection --

MARGARET GRANT: So, if I'm voting for him --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

MARGARET GRANT: -- but he's not really interested in me because he's got all of this.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, he will be interested. I think that would be unfair --

MARGARET GRANT: Well, not as much as the - this is where my life and where my family and friends all live.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes. Well, I think this is the argument that is being advanced is that people from Denny look more to Falkirk than they do to Cumbernauld.

MARGARET GRANT: Absolutely.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Does that summarise your position?

MARGARET GRANT: Yes, no family or friends in any of that area, but family --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, there are actually some nice people live in Cumbernauld.

MARGARET GRANT: Yes, yes. You know, it's maybe a pop through to Asda, then that's it, but all our friends and family, and everybody, my neighbours and all that, sons daughters all got married. They're all living here, but not over there.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Right. I think the point is very much one about - I think it has been made by a number of others, it is community ties and a sense of identity with the different geographical areas.

MARGARET GRANT: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I think it is perhaps a concern even if it is a misconception, I think it is important that people do not think that they are going to be impacted in terms of services, and that is a message that I think has to be made, perhaps, made more clear, at an earlier stage.

MARGARET GRANT: And maybe let people know that these things are being discussed. You know, you mentioned that this would all be going on the website.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, it is all available. It is not that it has been done behind people's backs.

MARGARET GRANT: No, but how do people know to look on a website if they don't know discussions are happening. You know, if somebody tells you --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: They are not reading their Daily Record quite as regularly, perhaps.

MARGARET GRANT: Do you know what I'm saying, but to find that - a paragraph in the Daily Record that took bits out of context - actually when I read some of the other stuff, caused the panic, but we didn't know it was happening.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I think all that can be said at this stage is that some of the concerns that you have articulated are more perceived than real. These are not real concerns, but what is a concern and what something has, it is a theme that has come through all of the objections that have been advanced is that there may be a lack of understanding of the community ties, particularly the Banknock, Haggs and Longcroft area.

MARGARET GRANT: Yes. I got all that and I will take all that back with me to my neighbours and friends --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Please do.

MARGARET GRANT: -- don't worry about it.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: And thank you very much for making the time to come --

MARGARET GRANT: It's only when your MSP doesn't...

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: -- that is the whole point.

MARGARET GRANT: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Now, is there anyone else within the audience just now who wishes to add to what has already been said? And I take it that James Kerr never reappeared?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: He has had to go to collect his grandson from school. He was hoping to get back, but he may join this evening.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, yes, there is - I was going to say, if there is anyone who has not had an opportunity then there will be a further session at 6 p.m. So, I think we can perhaps - that is ten to four, but I think we can bring this session to a close, I think. I do not expect that anyone else will attend now. So, if you are happy for me to bring that to a close, we can do that and reconvene at six o'clock. Thank you very much everyone for coming and thank you very much for your very helpful contributions, and my report will be issued shortly.

(15.54)

(Adjourned for a short time)

EVENING SESSION:

(17.57)

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Are you happy for me to start then? If Councillor Kerr comes back, he has already heard the opening remarks, so, all right. Well, we will just make a start because if anyone is going to show up then, obviously, they can come in the middle and I can re-cap at that stage. So, thank you very much for coming along tonight. This is the Boundaries Scotland inquiry, a local inquiry in relation to the constituencies around Falkirk, and you can see on the map, on the screen behind me showing the affected areas. Before I go any further, I will introduce myself. My name is Gillian Wade. I am actually the Sheriff Principal of Tayside, Central and Fife. That is my day job. So, I do not actually work for Boundaries Scotland, but in that role, I have been appointed by the Scottish Government to act as Assistant Commissioner for the purposes of chairing this inquiry. So, I cannot answer questions about the methodology, but I do have information which may be of assistance, which I will give you before we start, and it may enlighten you a bit about where we are with this process.

A couple of housekeeping points that I need to make before we go any further. There is not intended to be a fire alarm or fire drill, so if the fire alarm goes off then you must evacuate, and that simply means leaving by the doors and following the signage when you get out into the corridor. The facilities, you can find them if you go back through the back door there and if you are coming and going during the course of the proceedings, if you could do so through the back door, so that you can do so with minimum disruption.

All right. Now, I do have a list of some names of people who gave an indication that they might want to contribute, so there is no hard and fast running order. If anyone wants to contribute then obviously we are very keen to hear from you and you can just make yourselves known to me. If you want to address matters to me, then call

me whatever you like, but for the purposes, if we can, Madam Chair or Assistant Commissioner, or "Hey, you", whatever, but as long as you make it known if you want to contribute in anyway. If you cannot hear what is going on, then simply raise your hand or shout out, and we can do what we can to resolve that. When you do come forward, if you take a seat at this table here because what is being said is being transcribed, so you would speak into the microphone and keep your voice up as much as possible because everyone in the room would like to hear what you have to say.

So, with that, what I think would be the best thing is if I give you the opening statement, which I gave at the beginning of the afternoon session, and I think that gives you a bit of context to the inquiry and the scope of the inquiry, and the history to the inquiry and where we are, and that might help put things in a sharper focus, if you like.

So, the local inquiry provides you with an opportunity to make further comments or suggestions on the Commission's revised proposals for the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth; Falkirk North and Linlithgow and Falkirk South constituencies. Now, as I have just said, a transcript of today's proceedings is being made, and that will be published on the Boundaries Scotland website along with my report in due course.

Local Inquiries are held by the Commission in areas where a local authority has objected to their proposals, where there has been a strong local response or where they feel they want further 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 which it must follow.

The population, and therefore the electorate, of each constituency constantly changes, 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 why the Commission carry out regular reviews of the Scottish Parliament boundaries, in order to ensure electoral fairness.

Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998 requires Boundaries Scotland to conduct reviews of Scottish Parliament boundaries for constituencies and regions at intervals of eight to 12 years.

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

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

In formulating its proposals for constituencies, the Commission has a statutory duty to comply with Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998. That Schedule sets out a set of rules which have to be applied when designating constituencies.

The rules can be summarised as follows: there are to be 73 constituencies. Three of these are protected so not under review, and those are Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and Na h-Eileanan an Iar. Now, that is my Gaelic, but it means the Western isles. The remaining 70 constituencies must meet a set of requirements and must do so in such a way which, so far as practicable, is consistent throughout the whole of Scotland.

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

Rule 2 is that the electorate of each constituency is to be as near the electoral quota as is practicable, while having regard to Rule 1. The electoral quota is determined by dividing the total number of local government electors on the September 2022 electoral registers for all of Scotland, except the three preserved island constituencies, by 70. The electoral quota remains fixed throughout the period of the review and is 59,902 electors for this review. Best practice from the Venice Commission, that is the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, and previous reviews suggests an electorate within plus or minus 10 per cent 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 is that 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 is that 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 up by doing so.

Now, sometimes these rules can be seen as conflicting, and the Commission must exercise its discretion in deciding the appropriate weight of each in any given constituency. The Commission recognises that changes to constituencies are often unwelcome. However, the legislation requires that Parliamentary boundaries are regularly reviewed, and it places a duty on the Commission to do so. As in previous reviews, the main concerns have generally arisen from the need to take account of the movement of electorate within Scotland.

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

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

The Commission consulted on provisional proposals for constituencies in 2023. At the provisional proposal stage the two constituencies of Falkirk East and Falkirk West were unchanged from the existing constituencies. However, there was strong opposition to some of the proposed boundaries, especially in Clydebank where a boundary divided Clydebank between two constituencies and in the west of Edinburgh where concerns were raised about the lack of local ties between communities in West Lothian, such as Linlithgow and the west of Edinburgh. The Commission held local inquiries on its provisional proposals in Clydebank and Edinburgh as well as four other locations.

Following feedback from that provisional proposal consultation period, the local inquiries and the Assistant Commissioners' reports, the Commission developed new groupings of constituencies. It included a grouping of 17 constituencies within Argyll and Bute, East Dunbartonshire, Falkirk, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire and West Lothian Council areas. This new grouping aimed to address the concerns raised at the Edinburgh and Clydebank local inquiry and provide an alternative solution to the higher-than-average electorate growth in West Lothian and lower than average electorate in the existing Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency. As a consequence, the boundaries within the existing Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency; and the constituencies within Falkirk and West Lothian Council areas were amended at the revised proposal stage.

During the one-month public consultation on the revised proposals, which was held between April and May 2024, Falkirk Council objected to the revised proposals for: Cumbernauld and Kilsyth; Falkirk North; and Linlithgow and Falkirk South constituencies and requested a local inquiry because: the provisional proposals retained the existing Falkirk East and Falkirk West constituencies, and the revised proposals are the result of objections received elsewhere; the revised proposals divide Falkirk Council area across three constituencies while the two current constituencies sit within the area and are close to the electorate quota; the revised proposals break local ties by Denny; the proposed Falkirk North and Linlithgow and Falkirk South constituencies include the names of current Falkirk Council Wards which will be confusing for the electorate; and it will be challenging to administer cross council area constituencies for elections and confusing for the local electorate.

Under the terms of the legislation, if a council objects to a proposed constituency within its area, then a local inquiry must be held. However, there were over 40 other responses which mainly opposed the revised proposals because: local ties were broken between the communities of Banknock and Haggs/ Longcroft as well as that of Denny. The proposals do not consider the council area boundary, and Denny looks towards Falkirk rather than Cumbernauld.

However, a number of responses supported a Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency because it kept those towns with close links in the same constituency. There were also suggestions to include Denny in the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency name.

The Commission welcomes all comments and alternative suggestions to its revised proposals in the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth; Falkirk North; and Linlithgow and Falkirk South constituencies, not just on those issues raised in my statement today, noting again that the alternative constituency designs must meet the legislative requirements for this review.

At the end of the local inquiry, I will draft a report for the Commission with my comments and recommendations from today's proceedings. As I said earlier a transcript of today's inquiry will also be published on the Commission's website. The Commission will then consider my report, the responses to the public consultation on its revised proposals for constituencies and the transcript of today's inquiry when it agrees further proposals for consultation or its final recommendations for constituencies.

So, with that explanation may I firstly welcome the first speaker. Now, I do not know if the individuals who are named on this list are actually here or, in fact, whether there are others who wish to come forward. The names I have first of all are Maureen Yeats. Yes, would you like to come forward to the table here.

MAUREEN YEATS: I don't really have anything to ask at the moment. I'm more interested in finding out exactly what is happening.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, the purpose really, today, is to hear comments - it is more a listening exercise than, if you like a discussion or information providing event. All of the information is, really, available on the website and has been for some considerable time. I think there has been a concern that some of this may be new, but certainly, this is a point - we are quite well into the process. Now, if there are particular concerns it maybe that others will address them in what they want to say. Whereabouts are you from in the area?

MAUREEN YEATS: We're from Banknock.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, right, okay. Well, I mean, certainly in the afternoon session various issues were raised by a number of speakers who came from the area, so I am aware of a lot of the concerns which people from the Banknock area have --

MAUREEN YEATS: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: -- mostly relating to the perceived breaking up of ties and communities.

MAUREEN YEATS: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: So, between Banknock, Higgs and Longcroft, and I am very well aware of that from all the submissions I've had in writing and a lot of what was said earlier on today, but if you wish to come forward and give --

MAUREEN YEATS: Well, I can't really.

JOHN YEATS: Sorry, we were actually only notified - we didn't know anything about this until we received one letter telling us about this.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

JOHN YEATS: Should we have received information before, by post?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: This is a theme that, I suppose, has been apparent from the discussions this afternoon. Now, as I said at the outset, I do not work for the Commission, for Boundaries Scotland, at all. There is publication of the process, there has to be, and unfortunately, it appears that a lot of people have not really picked up the advertising which did take place. There was advertising in newspapers. Am I correct in saying that? There was extensive advertising in newspapers, and there was public notice of this. The website is available, and it does publish all of this, and a lot of information was available on the website, but I suspect that maybe within this particular area there was not much excitement generated at the initial stages, because there were not any changes proposed.

MAUREEN YEATS: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: And so nobody would be really, particularly exercised by what was being proposed when it was not actually affecting the communities that it now affects. What has happened and I think what I tried to explain in the opening statement, I appreciate maybe some of you missed that, but what I was explaining was that as a result of the outcomes of the inquiries which took place, particularly in Clydebank and Edinburgh, there has been a second stage and a revised proposal was put forward, and it is this revised proposal that this local inquiry is seeking to obtain views about. Now, you can see what the revised proposal is, and that is really, I suppose, the extent of the information which I hope the opening statement gave some explanation as to why the changes are being proposed. It is to take account and to make sure that the constituencies fairly represent the electorate across the whole of Scotland. So, you could not, for example, or you would not find it desirable to have one constituency with, say 30,000 people and another MSP having to represent 80,000 and obviously, that representation would not be equally shared. The MSP would have too much work to do in a big constituency and would not be able to represent the views of all the individuals there, and the MSP in the smaller constituency would, perhaps, be under deployed or really over representing a small proportion of people.

JOHN YEATS: In Banknock I believe we have about 60,000.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, that is right. Yes, so that is the aim, but there is a margin of error, if you like, about 10 per cent, plus or minus either way, and by the application of the rules which are enshrined in legislation then - and which the Boundary Commission have to have regard to then, they try and be as fair as they possibly can, having regard, obviously, to local authority boundaries and the other criteria, which are already spelt out. So, that is what they are seeking to achieve, but obviously it can be controversial, and I am aware of certain issues that have caused difficulties, and some of which I alluded to, particularly raised by Falkirk Council who have already given their submissions earlier today.

PATRICIA WALKER: Do Falkirk Council want this?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: No. Falkirk Council, as I have said, if we have achieved one thing from today, we have managed to establish that Falkirk Council are unanimous about opposing certainly the Falkirk, West Falkirk.

PATRICIA WALKER: Right. I can't speak for Denny, but I can speak for Banknock, and yourself, from there - a very small community, but a very tight knit community, separating them from the Haggs is just --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: What I need to do is - I think it is quite important we do this in a particular way, and I think it is very valuable. I know that people have not necessarily come prepared to speak, but because I have to do a report, and I have to make sure that everybody that comes along with a voice gets properly recorded - so, if you are uncomfortable coming forward and sitting and giving your name then by all means you do not have to do that, but it would be helpful if you would come forward, give your name so that it is recorded in the transcript, and then I have a full recording of everybody, where their interest is and what it is they would like to say, and I will put that into my report and take account of everybody's views, because you have gone to considerable effort to come along tonight and I think it is important. I have to follow the formal process. It is not just a public meeting, and I cannot answer your questions, but what I need to do is record the evidence base on which I make any recommendations. So, again, your name is first, is it Mrs Yeats, is it?

MAUREEN YEATS: Maureen Yeats.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Maureen Yeats. Do you want to take the stand, or not at the moment?

MAUREEN YEATS: Not at the moment, because I don't feel as if I've got enough information to actually question things. I am very concerned that the village will lose its identity --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, that is precisely what I would like you to say.

MAUREEN YEATS: -- and be swallowed up somewhere else. Now, the idea of moving into Cumbernauld, I mean, we have an identity as has already been alluded to.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

MAUREEN YEATS: We are a very tight knit community, and everybody looks after everybody, and getting sucked into Cumbernauld, which is a massive, big place - having lived there before I know exactly what I'm talking about - we would be minnows in the grand scheme of things --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

MAUREEN YEATS: -- and we would be lost. So, we need our identity to be kept, and I would be no more want us to be out of the Falkirk area than fly in the air. I mean, I think we need to retain that level of - that's where we come from.

PATRICIA WALKER: I can look at that from both sides. I'm originally from Kilsyth.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Right. Can I have your name, please, because I will record that as your submission --

MAUREEN WALKER: Yes, please, if you wouldn't mind.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: -- and I will make here that you have objections to what was proposed on the basis of the geographical links that your community has with

Falkirk, and you do not feel aligned to Cumbernauld, at all. You feel - I think your word was, "Minnows"?

MAUREEN YEATS: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Very well. Can I have your name, please?

PATRICIA WALKER: Patricia Walker.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Patricia Walker, and where are you from?

PATRICIA WALKER: I'm from Haggs.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Haggs?

PATRICIA WALKER: Yes. I've previously lived in Banknock, as well. I'm actually - so, I moved through to Haggs, 1996. So, I lived in Kilsyth, so I know how that council area works. Now, to let you understand, I left that council area because of the mistreatment and the ignorance, and being ignored when I really, really needed the help that I needed. Falkirk Council took me on, and Falkirk Council gave me back my life. That community we live in is very important.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, all right. I will just explain one thing, perhaps to put your mind at ease. This proposal makes no difference to which council you would be dealt with, or you would be dealing with. It makes no difference to, for example, the health service that you would be getting your treatment from. It would make no difference to anything apart from who would be your MSP. Now --

PATRICIA WALKER: Where would the local council be, then? Where would you go? So, if Haggs is still going to be in Falkirk, where does Banknock and Denny go? Do they go Kilsyth, do they go to Cumbernauld?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: No, no. The services are all provided by the existing - wherever you are within the constituency it would not change where, for example, the children went to school; it would not change any of the service provision. All that it means is that all the people, and I'm trying to explain this and I may be doing a disservice to my colleagues in the Boundary Commission, but if I am saying anything out of turn and not correctly explaining it then no doubt they will jump up and tell me, but really, at the moment, all the people in this pink area are represented in the Scottish Parliament by one MSP.

PATRICIA WALKER: Right.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Now, you can see that is quite a small area (points to map). What is proposed is that the people here, and that includes yourselves, all of the people in the pink area would, going forward, be represented by the same MSP, but the councillors, the local authority, the health service, the police, all of the same people that are representing you now and that you are dealing with now are going to still be the same people that you are dealing with. Nothing will change apart from all of these people will be represented by one MSP. Now, currently, the MSP for this area is the MSP that represents you.

PATRICIA WALKER: Right.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: So, it is just a different person representing you in the Scottish Parliament, but this boundary change is only in relation to the division of the electorate for the Scottish Parliament.

PATRICIA WALKER: So, is this all to do with votes?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: It is to do with the number of people voting in a particular area. I think - I do not know if you were here when I tried to explain --

PATRICIA WALKER: No, sorry, I have childcare to deal with. That's why I was late.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I appreciate - no, no absolutely, no, it is absolutely fine, and it is important that you understand what the purpose of all of this is. What Boundaries Scotland attempt to do is to make sure that everybody, effectively, is represented in the same way in the Scottish Parliament, and the way to do that is to ensure that you do not have one MSP who is representing a very small constituency, and another MSP who is representing a huge, big constituency in terms of numbers. It is not the size geographically of the community, it is the number of people that individual has to represent.

PATRICIA WALKER: Yes, I understand that, yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Now, obviously, if you had a situation where, for example, a constituency had 80,000 people in it, one MSP - that is an awful lot of work for one MSP and he would not be able to give all his, you know, enough attention to the number of people. So, the attempt is, by dividing the elect - the people who can vote by 70, an optimum number is arrived at for the purposes of this review, and that is just under 60,000, 59,902 people per area, per constituency.

PATRICIA WALKER: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Now, there can be 10 per cent, plus or minus. It is quite acceptable either side of that, and it can also be varied slightly because other considerations are taken into account, for example, local ties, and the effect that it would have on the practical administration of the constituency. And we have had, for example, representations during the course of this afternoon from Michael Matheson and others who are either councillors, MPs or MSPs, or he was the only MSP, who explained to me, and I will be writing the report, what the potential difficulties might be if you are trying to administer a constituency which covers lots of different local councils. So, they would have to, for example, speak to more than one council about a particular issue, or they would have to forge alliances with different individuals in different councils. So, that is a practical issue that I will have to take into consideration when making my recommendations, but it will not affect in any way the actual services which you are getting. So, you would not, for example, be sent back to get your - whatever services that you are getting now from Falkirk Council, they would not have to be delivered by another council. You would still remain within Falkirk Council.

DEREK WALKER: The borders will stay the same?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: The borders will stay the same.

PATRICIA WALKER: Budget-wise, is that affected?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: No.

PATRICIA WALKER: No. No finances, nothing?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: No. It is simply a matter of who represents you in the Scottish Parliament.

PATRICIA WALKER: So, the area itself is not changing then?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: No.

PATRICIA WALKER: So, it will still be Falkirk --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: You will still be in Falkirk Council.

PATRICIA WALKER: -- or are we going to be North Lanarkshire?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: No, you will still be in Falkirk Council. North Lanarkshire Council will deal with the people who are currently being dealt with --

PATRICIA WALKER: So, it is just the MSP we are talking about?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, just the MSP.

PATRICIA WALKER: That's what it's about?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, that is what it is about.

DEREK WALKER: Can it not just be a guaranteed thing that there won't be any border changes?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, when I gave - actually, I will make sure that you are provided with a copy of the opening statement. Can you provide the lady and gentleman with a copy of that, which explained that, no, there will not be changes in any of these things. What I read out at the start, and it makes it absolutely clear that "The Commission wishes to emphasise that its review relates solely to boundaries for the Scottish Parliament and does not affect the structure or arrangements of local government areas or the services that they provide. Parliamentary boundaries do not affect the provision of council services, health services, or council tax, and they do not signal a desire to change any other boundaries, including school catchments or local authority boundaries or the remit of community councils. So, electoral boundaries are purely for the purposes of identifying constituencies for elections." I think that that has certainly been, perhaps, something that has not been well understood by people who attended this afternoon.

PATRICIA WALKER: I was listening to you saying that it was in the newspapers and it's, obviously, been on the websites, but the problem with that is - I don't know about anybody else here - I don't buy a paper. I certainly wouldn't be checking up on local council websites.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I think it has been on some social media platforms, as well. I think it has been advertised on Facebook and elsewhere, but, you know, I appreciate there are some people who simply have not been privy to the information and are finding it out later on. As I said, although this is a process that has been going on since - well, really earlier than 2023, but because initially there was no proposal to change any boundaries here, nobody was particularly interested, but the interest has been generated because the revised proposal makes these changes.

PATRICIA WALKER: It would be nice to see a lot more people here because I think they would maybe understand you a wee bit more, because as far as when I'm talking to people in our area, they're worried about all those things you are saying that are not going to change. That is their main worry. That's why we came here tonight to find out exactly what was the purpose of this because if that's the case and it's about MSPs and getting a fair amount of numbers to separate it fairly that they can deal with, then is that going to be up and down the country then?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, well the same quota applies throughout the whole of Scotland.

PATRICIA WALKER: Yes, right, okay. It's not just us? This is a bigger scheme?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Oh no, the review covers the whole of Scotland.

PATRICIA WALKER: Right, okay.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I indicated at the start, in somewhat imperfect Gaelic, that there are three constituencies that are not affected but they are the Northern Isles, really, and the Western Isles. So, they are protected because they are what they are. But the remainder, they should be broadly equal in terms of the number of people involved.

PATRICIA WALKER: Now, I understand that but it wasn't what we were led to believe.

JOHN YEATS: No, we were actually only notified recently, but as you say, newspapers. We buy one newspaper, a Sunday newspaper, that's all. It just seems a lot of other people would -- If it's in the press, I don't know, but we knew nothing about the boundary change.

PATRICIA WALKER: No, and I haven't heard any locals even speaking about it. So, that is how little Banknock knows about this.

JOHN YEATS: We had meeting - I'm going away from the - they're going to open a McDonald's in Banknock, Hags. So, there was a meeting there about two weeks ago about it. They didn't know anything about a boundary change.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, that would not have -

JOHN YEATS: -- which would have been quite important.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: It actually isn't particularly relevant to them.

PATRICIA WALKER: It's just about the MSPs. It's not going to be any issue to them.

JOHN YEATS: No, but we're not knowing that at the time.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I understand that and I think my colleagues – that is a message that has come through loud and clear that there may be better ways of disseminating the information in future to make sure that people have a fuller understanding, but that is something that – it is not that the information has not been there. But that people, perhaps, did not know how to access it.

JOHN YEATS: No, well –

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: And that is something that is not necessarily an outcome for this inquiry. Now, the lady here?

DALE ROBB: My name is Dale Robb. I'm the Elections Manager in Falkirk Council.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes. Do you want to maybe come forward because people are turning round to see you.

DALE ROBB: Sorry, I am hiding at the back.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Thank you very much. Take a seat if you wish.

DALE ROBB: Falkirk Council, if there is any kind of review such as this, this review – we are notified directly by Boundaries Scotland or the Boundary Commission for Scotland. The material is given to us and it is put on to the council website. It is on the relevant source websites. It is picked up by Council and there are also notices and press releases that are issued to the local press. Notices are put into the local libraries as well, so for this one, the information is displayed in Denny Library, Grangemouth and Falkirk, so there is one in your own area, and then the other sort of larger libraries but also at least one library covering each of the areas concerned. So, the information is there. So there is a lot of communication, but whether there are breaks in the links to the communication chain – so whether the local press is picking it up at the same time as the libraries are picking it up at the same time as anyone is able to access the website – so it is there, but it is knowing how to tap into that.

PATRICIA WALKER: I think what surprised me most is when it comes to elections, there's plenty of leaflets come through the door explaining why they want your vote and what they are going to do for you. Nothing has come through our door.

DALE ROBB: I think there is also the difference that if you look at in ground level terms, and there is one of our councillors here tonight as well, your councillors are representing you very locally, so we've got nine council wards across the council area and you will have either three or four councillors representing you. So, that is at one level, and then you have what we were talking about just now, the Scottish Parliamentary MSPs. So you are looking at the same area, but dividing it into bigger areas so there is not in nine wards. At the moment, it is two constituencies, so the same council area, so you have a council boundary all the way right round and then you have two constituencies just now, Falkirk East and Falkirk West. They are each represented by one MSP, one constituency MSP, and there is the list MSPs, which

there is a link with North Lanarkshire for them because that is a wider area again, but we are only looking at part of it for Falkirk. And then we have got we have just had, the UK Parliamentary elections and that is another level again. So, every level is represented in a slightly different way but with constituencies that have a different number of electors, so then whether it is a constituency or a ward, so the UK Parliamentary one has one sort of ball park figure of how many electors are within that and then you have the same at a different level for the Scottish Parliamentary and then the local level for the council. So, everybody reporting different - or reporting to different people for different functions, but all contained within the Falkirk Council boundary as we are looking at. So, as was explained earlier, there is no change to any of that, but your MSP, instead of only covering an area within the Falkirk Council boundary, will straddle two local authority areas, so some from North Lanarkshire, some from Falkirk. There will be people in the middle who will only have one MSP covering only Falkirk, an area within the Falkirk Council area itself, and then there is another area that will be the blue part there (points to map). That takes you into West Lothian as well, which we have for the UK Parliamentary elections already. We have cross boundaries there.

DEREK WALKER: Can I ask you something?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Can I just get your name there? Did you say Dale Robson?

DALE ROBB: Dale Robb.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: And you are the?

DALE ROBBS: Business and Elections Manager, Falkirk Council.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Thanks.

DEREK WALKER: Can I ask you something? So, that area between Skinflats and South Alloa, right now, is that Falkirk South, the yellow part (points to map)?

DALE ROBBS: It will be - for the Scottish Parliament it is Falkirk East and Falkirk West.

DEREK WALKER: All right. So, if it is to do with numbers, I am a wee bit confused because that area there - there's hardly any numbers but yet you are taking Linlithgow, Winchburgh, etc., whatever the population is has probably doubled by now.

DALE ROBBS: And that's why you have it like that, so you are going to have areas that are sparsely populated and areas that are more densely populated. So, if it is a lighter area, that's going to have a spread of people to get to your quota - to get to the electorate numbers.

DEREK WALKER: But what I am trying to understand is if that area up there is sparser and then they've taken Linlithgow onwards, which is probably overpopulated, then that's putting their numbers way up, is it not?

DALE ROBBS: No, that's the whole purpose.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: No, this proposal – the point of this proposal is that it would make each constituency that you see equal in terms of the number or broadly equal in terms of the number of electors, even though it looks like a bigger area. You do not judge by the actual area on the ground; it is by the number of people, so that exercise has already been done.

DEREK WALKER: Right.

PATRICIA WALKER: Do you have numbers? Before you change it all, do you have the numbers as what they stand just now?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Oh, yes, yes.

PATRICIA WALKER: And then what they will be after the change?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, yes.

PATRICIA WALKER: At the change?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, and the problem is that the existing pink area (points to map) is less – there are too few people in that pink area at the moment, but the pink area, if it takes in Denny is more on a par with the other constituencies.

DEREK WALKER: So, it is just unfortunate that we are that side of the motorway.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well –

DEREK WALKER: But back to the connections between Banknock, Haggs and Longcroft. Its a community that's been built a couple of hundred years ago, or whatever, and I am getting a wee bit just frightened in case it gets shipped out into North Lanarkshire.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

DEREK WALKER: But you have it in black and white that it's not going to happen, so –

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: No, it is not going to affect the – it doesn't affect the council as such but the issue about the communities and the community ties is still an important one. Is there anything else you would like to add?

DALE ROBB: No, it wasn't my intention to speak at all. No, I don't think so, but if there is anything that I can help with, just to explain that it is really confusing. Just as an aside to that, we had a recent review of the UK Parliamentary elections, which you would notice there were differences this time around for the UK Parliament, so the Bo'ness area is now within West Lothian boundary for that, but that has been the case for a number of years, but they have changed the name of it, and only by changing the name of it, people became aware of it, so again, you can be voting for somebody and you don't realise that that person is actually – that election has been managed by another council, but that person is still there to represent you and it is only sometimes when it comes down to something like the name of a constituency that that is when there is a perceived loss of identity because you have had your

name there and it is no longer there, but it should not make any difference to the service provision and the delivery of the services, but it makes a difference at a local level to your perception of your identity and being recognised as retaining that identity.

DEREK WALKER: So, for instance, if there is an MSP from Denny and for some reason he got voted in that full area, Kilsyth and Cumbernauld, which is very, very likely unlikely, the size of Cumbernauld voting for their own MSP –

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Oh, there definitely will be an MSP for that area. That is for sure.

PATRICIA WALKER: There has to be.

DEREK WALKER: Then it just means the guy from Denny has not got a chance.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: No, no, not at all. I mean, the MSP who stands – the Scottish Election will take place in the usual way. And nothing will change about the way in which the electoral process goes ahead. Once that person is elected to represent that constituency, that MSP, whoever that might be, has a duty to all of the constituents.

PATRICIA WALKER: Yes, but you usually find when it comes to your local area, you will vote for a local person. That is just the way it happens. If you've got a small community; they have got a person that they really like and would like to stand for them. If you are taking on all of that side against that small pocket, the chances are he's is not going to get through.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: All of these are issues about the geography and the effect which it would have for the electorate.

PATRICIA WALKER: Because you find communities are loyal. That's what I am trying to say. You know, they like to have all local people standing up for them. We've got Alf Kelly here just now, you know, because he is our local Councillor and he has a lot to do with the community. I couldn't mention anybody else in that community that I know is in the Falkirk area working, trying to help you and support you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, Mr Kelly has actually already given a very full submission this afternoon and obviously a lot of the points that you are making here, he has certainly articulated earlier on today and these are points that will definitely be taken into consideration, very, very valid points, but I think a lot comes out of the fact that there is a strong sense of community, which I think the people from those areas have said that they feel would be undermined if these particular changes took place.

PATRICIA WALKER: Well, we are already forgotten, aren't we? Bus services that doesn't exist.

MAUREEN YEATS: The village has, honestly – I mean we have no infrastructure –

PATRICIA WALKER: We have to do it ourselves.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, unfortunately, this inquiry is not about that. As much as I'd love to be able to sort your problems out, I am afraid as Sheriff Principal I can do very little in that particular –

MAUREEN YEATS: It is really, really bad. If you do not drive and you are reliant on public transport, you have no chance.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, that is a point that was made –

(Tannoy announcement)

DALE ROBB: I will go and see what has happened to my car.

JOHN YEATS: Seeing as they're doing all the calculations about how many people, have you taken into account about future developments?

PATRICIA WALKER: I was going to ask that as well.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: It's as it is at the moment. It's the electorate as it is at the moment because that's who's going to be voting in the most proximate election.

MAUREEN YEATS: It's going to make this null and void, to be perfectly honest, whatever you are doing now because there's 350 houses going to be built in Banknock, right, 350?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: There was discussion about that earlier today but what I have to be clear about, and probably did not make it clear enough, Boundaries Scotland are tied by legislation. Now, if they're to do something different, a whole different set of rules, that would require a change in the legislation and that's a whole different argument. That has to happen in the Scottish Parliament, but what is happening is that these proposals have to comply with the rules which are set down in the Scotland Act. And that is obviously a requirement and you are looking at the electorate now, but that's why there has to be a review every so often to make sure that the electorate is properly reflected across the whole of Scotland.

PATRICIA WALKER: When is the final decision made?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: It has to be made by May, is that correct?

KIRSTY MAVOR: May 2025.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: May 2025, but I will be producing my report following this inquiry and I should be doing that within the next few weeks, as soon as I have all the information collated and I will produce that as quickly as possible and that will be available on the Boundaries Scotland website.

PATRICIA WALKER: Right.

JOHN YEATS: So the boundaries changing and nothing else?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: The boundaries for the elections are changing.

PATRICIA WALKER: And the way I'm picking it up is basically to make it better for the MSPs, so they're taking some of the workload off you and sharing it equally?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, it's to make it better for the MSPs but ultimately better for the electorate as well because if the MSP can't actually represent.

PATRICIA WALKER: Yes, I understand that. I'm glad I came because this was not what I thought it was.

MAUREEN YEATS: It's not what I expected either.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I've had other names on the list but I'm not sure if anyone – is there anyone else who would like to come forward and give a statement or is everyone else here just for observation purposes?

DEREK WALKER: There's so much to say but if it's gone then it's kind of pointless.

MAUREEN YEATS: I think the saddest thing about this is I would hazard a guess and I think I would be right in saying this, nine-tenths of Banknock people don't know about this.

JOHN YEATS: No, they don't know about the boundary change.

MAUREEN YEATS: They don't even know anything about this.

DEREK WALKER: I was actually surprised to learn they're not holding it at Banknock.

MAUREEN YEATS: I'm shocked at that as well --

DEREK WALKER: -- because there's a lot of elderly there as well --

MAUREEN YEATS: -- because we have a big community centre which is more than able to deal with a lot of people, and it would have given the people of Banknock the opportunity of listening and –

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: If it's any consolation, what I would say is that perhaps the greatest representation at this inquiry – in fact, not perhaps, definitely – of people who are not representing organisations or political parties has been from people of Banknock and Denny, so the voice of the people of Banknock, Haggs, Denny and Longcroft has been well and truly heard.

DEREK WALKER: It tells you a lot about the people.

MAUREEN YEATS: We are very loyal to one another – I'll say that.

DEREK WALKER: I've got a friend in Denny, who has no idea about this

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, I'm quite sure there are a lot of people, but I think it was helpful to have the explanation. It was published. Unfortunately, it may be that people are not necessarily looking in the places where the publication has been and I'm sure that is something that can be taken forward with Boundaries Scotland going forward for future inquiries.

MAUREEN YEATS: I think there has to be better communication for everyone concerned and a leaflet drop would not be amiss. You know, when it's in an election, you're bombarded with it, but for something as important as boundary changes and possibilities of things being different, people should be aware of it. And then they're going to get it second, third, 10th hand by the time, and the whole problem is bits get added on and it never ends up -

PATRICIA WALKER: Chinese whispers.

MAUREEN YEATS: -- you know, the way the actual message was put across and that's my big, big fear that people, they find a button and sew on a coat, as the saying goes. You know, they make it into something much bigger than it actually is. It's big enough.

PATRICIA WALKER: They're also against people that make these decisions anyway, so -

MAUREEN YEATS: I know.

PATRICIA WALKER: -- they really don't have much of a say anyway.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, you do. I mean that is the point of having today. Certainly. I can give you an assurance that your position is well and truly noted. I was aware before the inquiry that this would be something controversial and indeed I am correct about that. That has been - a large part of the representation has been about that particular area and the changes that have been proposed, but as I said, I can't do anything else, and I'm sure there are lots of other community issues, but Mr Kelly is in. He'll deal with them all.

JOHN YEATS: Well, let me go back to that thing we were at the other week there about that McDonalds.

PATRICIA WALKER: That's when I found out about that.

JOHN YEATS: You see, the people, the majority of the people that were there, the biggest percentage of the people that were there, we happened to mention that we were coming to this meeting about the boundary change and that was just a general conversation - we thought they knew. Nobody knew in that hall. They were all there. Nobody in that hall knew, so the information being supplied or sent out is missing Banknock. It must be Brigadoon -

PATRICIA WALKER: Or they forgot -

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: I think that message has been taken forward and will be noted.

DEREK WALKER: Is your address in Haggs or is it Banknock?

MAUREEN YEATS: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes.

MAUREEN YEATS: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

JOHN YEATS: [REDACTED]

MAUREEN YEATS: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

JOHN YEATS: [REDACTED]

MAUREEN YEATS: [REDACTED] --

DEREK WALKER: There's a sign, they've put a new one up just as you come off the motorway. [REDACTED] Is there not still one nearer the doctor's, Hags/ Banknock.

MAUREEN YEATS: No, I've never seen it.

DEREK WALKER: They used to have a sign at the doctor's, the Hags and Banknock sign. Is that the boundary line there, for Hags?

ALF KELLY: No, the boundary's the motorway.

DEREK WALKER: I always thought that there was always a sign at the Banknock doctors, just between the doctors and the community centre there -

PATRICIA WALKER: There used to be there, there used to be.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: What I am going to do, on the basis that I think we've had the discussion which is pertinent to the inquiry and clearly your points are noted, very well made and clearly noted and, as I said, they are echoing what I heard this afternoon. If there's nothing additional to add, then what I will do is draw this meeting to a close. I thank you very much for coming. I think it has been very helpful and I definitely value your input. It's extremely important to get the views of everybody and also I hope you are going away with some sort of reassurance and some sort of understanding.

PATRICIA WALKER: Is there information I can take? My daughter could not make it here tonight. Is there information I can take that I can give here?

KIRSTY MAVOR: I've got a copy of the opening statement here.

PATRICIA WALKER: Thank you and I can give it to anyone.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Yes, please, and also the website can provide you with significant additional information about what is proposed. I am sure that if there are further queries, then that can -

PATRICIA WALKER: You can't keep an eye on something if somebody doesn't tell you, do you understand what I mean? That's how we came here - like, no idea what's happening at all.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: Well, I hope that that's somewhat helped.

PATRICIA WALKER: No, you have been very clear, thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL WADE: All right. Thank you very much for coming everybody and we will draw the meeting to a close.

(18.53)

(The Evening Session Adjourned at 19.00)