

THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND

PUBLIC HEARING

2018 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies

Held at:

Ayr Town Hall

New Bridge Street

Ayr

KA7 1JX

on

Thursday, 1 December 2016

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE

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Isabel Drummond-Murray (Secretary)

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SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Hearings are being held throughout Scotland as part of the review by the Boundary Commission for Scotland of the UK and parliamentary constituencies in Scotland. My name is Ian Abercrombie, I am the Sheriff Principal of South Strathclyde, Dumfries & Galloway and I have been appointed to chair today's public hearing. Other representatives from the Commission here today include Isabel Drummond-Murray who is sitting on my left, she is the Secretary, and the back room team organising event are Douglas Campbell and Colin – where is Colin? There he is: Colin Wilson. The public hearing is part of a 12 week consultation period on the Commission's initial proposals for constituencies. The proposals were published last month and appear on the website of the Commission together with a booklet, maps and a great deal of other explanation. Copies of this information is available today for anybody who would like to get hold of it.

The purpose of today is twofold, firstly for the Commission to explain its proposals and then, secondly, to provide an opportunity for members of the public and qualifying parties to make comments or representations about any of the Commission's initial proposals for the constituencies in Scotland. My role is threefold. First of all I have got to determine the procedure to be followed today. I have got to ensure that the Act of 1986 is followed and I also have to ensure that all those speaking have an opportunity to make representations if they want to do so. Can I stress that my role is entirely independent. I am independent of the Commission. I play no part in the ongoing review, and I am simply here today to ensure fair play and I hope, orderly conduct of the proceedings.

I intend to adopt a flexible and informal approach. I will shortly invite the Secretary, Isabel, to make an opening statement and to explain the proposals of the Commission. After that I will invite

comments from those who have already indicated their intention to address the hearing today and who wish to make oral representations. The staff have prepared very helpfully a running list of the people who have already indicated they wish to speak and I will call people in the order on that list. Once I hear from all those on the list I will give an opportunity to others to indicate that they wish to speak so do not despair, I will give everybody present who wishes an opportunity to speak that opportunity.

I am not going to make any formal demands that people adhere to time limits or anything given the amount of people in the room today, but obviously if people are going on for too long I might have something to say about that so I would like everybody to try to keep it to certainly under half an hour for each representation. Oral evidence should just be given from where you feel comfortable, I think the microphones can be picked up in any part of the room, and there will be a microphone handed to you. If anybody cannot hear anything please let me know and we will endeavour to fix that. As soon as you start your representation please specify your full name and identify whether you are acting in a representative capacity or not. This is because the Commission will be recording the proceedings today. A transcript of the proceedings will be prepared in due course and that will be placed on the Commission's website. The idea behind that is that everybody's comments will be widely made available to those who care to look at them. After the comments and the transcript have been placed on the website there will be a four week period for scrutiny and an opportunity for people to make further observations to the Commission on anything that was said today or at any of the comments made. After that there will be a third opportunity to comment because the Commission will then respond to the proposals and if it thinks appropriate to revise any of them there will be further opportunity to make further comments on any revised proposals. Full details of the procedure I have just outlined to you will be found in the booklet which I have already referred to. Speaking at this public hearing today is only one of the ways in which an individual or an organisation can make representations in support of or in opposition to the proposals. There are other methods of how representations can be made. You can make a written representation, for example, you can send an email to the Commission or you may use the consultation area on the consultation website. The consultation period started last month on 20 October and it runs until 11 January 2017.

Ladies and gentlemen, if I can just make one thing absolutely clear, this is not the appropriate forum to challenge, debate or discuss the Act or the legislation. The legislation sets requirements. We are bound by that. You may not agree with it, you may not agree with the Act but that is not a matter for discussion today. What is a matter for discussion is whether or not you want to make representations about the proposals that are before you. So, without further comment I would invite Isabel to start her explanation. I will then ask for a brief opportunity for questions along the lines I have indicated and then I will call on the representatives to speak about anything else. I hope that is all clear. Isabel.

MS DRUMMOND-MURRAY: Thank you very much. I am Isabel Drummond-Murray, I am Secretary of the Commission, and what I plan to do over the next up to 10 minutes is to give you an explanation of the legislation, policies and procedures, and then explain the initial proposals. Can you hear me alright sitting here or would you rather I stood? The legislation governing the review is the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986. That Act has been substantially amended by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011. As a result of the change in legislation

there will be a UK parliament of 600 constituencies, down from 650. In Scotland there will be 53 instead of the current 59. Two Scottish constituencies are specified in the legislation. They are Western Isles and Orkney & Shetland. Each of the other 51 must have an electorate within 5 per cent of the UK electoral quota and that is 74,769.2 for this review. This means that each constituency must have no fewer than 71,031 electors and no more than 78,507. There is an exception to this when the constituency's area exceeds 12,000 square kilometres and it may then have an electorate that is lower than the 95 per cent quota if it is not reasonably possible for it to comply with that requirement. No constituency can exceed 13,000 square kilometres.

In 2011 we commenced our sixth review of the UK parliament constituencies. However parliament amended the legislation in January 2013 and as a result we stopped work on the review and did not complete it. That means that this is therefore the first review at which specific numerical limits have been applied to the electorate or to the geographical area. The legislation does state that we can take into account factors other than electorate, namely, special geographical considerations including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of the constituency; the boundaries of council areas and electoral wards; existing UK parliament constituency boundaries; and any local ties that may be broken by changes in constituencies.

We are aware that the Scottish government has introduced new ward boundaries in many council areas. The legislation requires us, however, to have regard to the ward boundaries that were in use at the last local government elections. We cannot therefore take account of the new ward boundaries at this stage but we can take account of existing local ties. When designing constituencies we have aimed to design as many as practicable that do not cross the council area boundary. We have also endeavoured to avoid breaking local ties. We have taken into consideration local geography such as transport links, electoral and administrative boundaries, and natural features, and we have taken into consideration special geographic considerations where appropriate. As part of the review we must also recommend a name for each constituency and designate it as either a council or a burgh. That designation affects the expenses allowable at elections. With regard to names the guidelines we have adopted are as follows: to use an existing constituency name where its successor is recognisably similar; to prefer short names rather than to attempt to describe an area exhaustively; to ensure the names of UK parliament constituencies in general differ from those of the Scottish parliament where an appropriate and distinct alternative is available; not to place compass points at the beginning of a name unless it is part of the name of a council area or town such as East Kilbride or East Lothian; and not to use the same name for a constituency in a council area unless the two are coterminous. We have published a booklet setting out the policies and procedures for the review and, as the Sheriff Principal said, they can be found on the website and I believe there are some copies here today.

As an independent and politically impartial body ourselves we do not take into account patterns of voting or the results of elections when reviewing boundaries nor do the political parties' views of where boundaries should be have any more weight than those of members of the public. To assist with design and with minimising the number of constituencies crossing council area boundaries we designed groups of council areas which can be exactly covered by a whole number. The strict limits on the number of electors in each constituency mean that the design of each may affect the design of a number of others across a wide area. We have considered whether to design any constituencies in Scotland larger than 12,000 square kilometres to which the exception to the minimum electorate

rule would apply and we have not applied that exception to any of the constituencies in these initial proposals.

In our initial proposals 35 constituencies are contained in a single council area and the remaining 18 combine parts of two council areas. Thirty wards out of 353 in Scotland are divided between constituencies. There are 13 constituencies which contain only whole wards, 23 containing a number of whole wards and part of one, 14 containing parts of two wards, two containing parts of three wards, and one containing parts of four wards. Where wards have been split we have generally tried to do so using community council boundaries, major transport features and other recognisable geographical and community boundaries.

The council areas that form the geographic focus of this public hearing are East Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, and South Ayrshire. However, you are welcome to comment on any part of our initial proposals at any public hearing. In our initial proposals this set of council areas is exactly covered by seven constituencies. Two, Ayr & Carrick and Cunninghame West are within a single council area and the other five cover two council areas. The proposals do not split Ayr, Kilmarnock or Paisley between constituencies. South Ayrshire council area contains one constituency wholly within the area, Ayr & Carrick, which follows ward boundaries in the council area. Kilmarnock, Cumnock & Doon Valley follows ward boundaries in East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire with one exception, ward 6, Irvine Valley, of East Ayrshire where the boundary follows the railway line and this boundary is shared with Cunninghame East. Cunninghame East also follows ward boundaries in East Renfrewshire except for ward 1, Neilston, Uplawmoor & Newton Mearns North, where the boundary follows the community council boundary. Cunninghame East is bordered with Paisley. Paisley also follows ward boundaries in East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire council areas with one exception, ward 1 of East Renfrewshire council area. Cunninghame West follows ward boundaries in North Ayrshire with one exception, ward 6, Dalry & West Kilbride, where the boundary follows the community council boundary. This constituency is bordered by Inverclyde & Largs. It contains all of Inverclyde council area and wards in North Ayrshire with one exception, ward 6 of North Ayrshire council area. The final constituency in this grouping is West Renfrewshire which follows ward boundaries in North Ayrshire and Renfrewshire council areas.

I was going to go on to talk about the consultation procedure but I think probably you have covered that in your opening remarks so this is just to say this is one of five public hearings and you can submit views either here today or go away and talk to other people and submit views using the information on our website. Our privacy policy is that we will publish names of individuals and organisations who comment but we will not publish your personal contact details such as personal numbers and email addresses. As already said, the consultation process closes on 11 January and after that there will be further rounds of consultation so this is not the final opportunity, this is the start of the process. The final point to make is that we will submit our report containing final recommendations to the Secretary of State for Scotland before 1 October 2018. That is all I have to say.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Thank you very much indeed. Are there any points of clarification which anybody has arising from that very helpful canter through the procedure which I found enormously interesting myself. Does anybody have any comments or issues on that? (Negative) thank you. The first person who has asked to give a talk today is Murray Tosh. Murray,

could you start, please, and if you could start by giving your name and your representative capacity I would be very grateful.

MR TOSH: Thank you, Sheriff Principal. Good morning and good morning, ladies and gentlemen. As the Sheriff Principal said, my name is Murray Tosh, I represent the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, and by way of a little bit of background I was a Kyle & Carrick district councillor for nine very fulfilling years. I had monthly meetings in this very chamber. On behalf of all the people in Kyle & Carrick from those days gone by I am delighted to welcome you all to what was a council chamber and to proceed with my statement. I have also been a member of the Scottish parliament, firstly a regional member for the south of Scotland region which included Dumfries & Galloway, South Ayrshire and parts of east and North Ayrshire, which will all be discussed today, and then latterly for the west of Scotland which includes Inverclyde, Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and the remaining part of North Ayrshire, so I covered virtually all of the areas we are going to be talking about.

Today I am going to give the Scottish Conservatives' interim response to the proposed constituencies which are the focus of today's hearing. We are still consulting on the initial proposals and we will want to assess the reaction from the public, local authorities and other political parties before we lodge a final formal response covering the whole of Scotland, which we will do by the 11 January deadline. We are considering counterproposals and alternative groupings in some parts of Scotland but we will be proposing no changes today other than naming changes. In coming to a final judgment on these seven constituencies we will take into account the counterproposal involving different groupings of which the Scottish Labour Party gave notice at the Glasgow hearing. At this stage we know only that they will argue for the grouping proposed in the last review, the sixth review, which is uncompleted, to link Dumfries & Galloway with south and East Ayrshire. The relevance of that to today's hearing is obvious as the consequence of that change would be to alter the grouping of the six councils in the former counties of Ayrshire and Renfrewshire, and the boundaries at least of some of the proposed constituencies before us today.

As a party we endorsed the findings of the sixth review, the groupings and the constituencies for the whole of the south west of Scotland, and if the Labour Party were to propose new constituencies in line with those proposed in the last review we could hardly say that those proposals were unacceptable. I spoke positively at the New Lanark hearing in the sixth review about the proposals under consideration then and I recall being particularly welcoming about the proposed Dumfriesshire constituency which met all local aspirations and which I believe our Labour colleagues want to recreate in this review. That was discussed at length last week in Glasgow where Dumfriesshire was part of the local hearing.

While I will respond today to the Boundary Commission's current proposals for the current groupings we have to be consistent and we will be open minded about the counterproposal. The Labour Party cannot propose exactly the same constituencies as were proposed in the sixth review because the four constituencies to be formed then from North Ayrshire, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire councils no longer contains sufficient electors but the addition of the neighbouring grouping which was proposed then of South Lanarkshire and East Renfrewshire councils could provide a workable model to be compared with the current initial proposals. For today we acknowledge that the Commission's initial proposal for the seven constituencies before this hearing

do conform with Schedule 2 of the 1986 Act which lays down the rules for distribution of seats. The rules require the Commission to take into account local government boundaries and we agree that that imperative has been satisfied by allocating seven seats to six relatively small councils in such a way as to minimise crossings of local council boundaries or dividing wards. We also agree, after the linkages between different parts of Ayrshire and neighbouring areas were exhaustively debated in the first review of Scottish parliament constituencies, that the road and rail links between Ayrshire and Renfrewshire are far less daunting than those connecting Ayrshire with Dumfries & Galloway or Lanarkshire, and that is reflected in the day in-day out movement of local people for work, shopping and leisure. If constituencies are to reflect the daily lives of people in our communities then it appears to us logical that electoral wards which cannot be accommodated in constituencies wholly within Ayrshire should be included in constituencies containing electors from Renfrewshire.

The councils we are considering today cover exactly the former counties of Renfrewshire and Ayrshire, and also the 10 Scottish parliament constituencies which cover those former counties. The introduction after devolution of a uniform UK electoral quota, the uncoupling of Scottish parliament constituencies from the UK constituencies and now the reduction in the size of the Westminster parliament have all come together in a very short period of time to disrupt the political map of Scotland and we think that this review at least in this part of Scotland can create stable constituencies for both parliaments, although the Scottish one has been done already, for the UK parliament as well, and give electors a clearer sense of the constituencies they live in. We know that in general medium sized councils such as today's councils want to be in constituencies which coincide with their areas but four of today's councils are too large and two too small to become coterminous constituencies. No matter how the distribution is made there will be surplus wards, surplus electors from the larger councils which will have to be grouped with electors in the smaller councils. We think that the Commission's overall approach here has been sensible and consistent. Every council has been given a constituency covering their core urban areas and as far as possible the surplus electors from the larger councils have been combined sensitively with neighbouring areas.

These councils all have a strong sense of community and continuity. South Ayrshire has Kyle & Carrick, North Ayrshire has Cunninghame, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire have existed since 1975 as district and then as unitary authorities. East Ayrshire contains two districts which have existed for the same period of time, Kilmarnock & Loudoun and Cumnock & Doon Valley. East Renfrewshire is essentially the old Eastwood district with Paisley & Neilston added to it from Renfrewshire district. The division proposed today within East Renfrewshire, within that council's area, reflects the difference between the core Eastwood, a largely residential suburban constituency, and the small towns of Neilston and Barrhead which have more of an industrial heritage, and while content to be in East Renfrewshire have strong links also with Paisley in Renfrewshire. Indeed they were in Renfrewshire district from 1975 to 1996 and today are contained in a Scottish parliament constituency of Renfrewshire South.

Starting from the south of the grouping it is clear that South Ayrshire Council is too large and must lose a ward, and we think that the logical one to link with a neighbouring council is the Kyle ward as proposed by the Commission. Kyle ward is a village ward and all of the villages in the Kyle ward clearly look towards Prestwick or Ayr or Troon for their services and their local connections. They all belong in South Ayrshire but it is also the case that Dundonald and Craigie look also towards

Kilmarnock, as perhaps to a lesser extent does Symington. Monkton obviously looks towards Prestwick primarily but it is linked to Kilmarnock by a direct high quality modern expressway, a dual carriageway. Monkton, Symington and Dundonald are served by regular bus services between Ayr and Kilmarnock, and Tarbolton and Mossblown, again very much part of South Ayrshire, do look to an extent towards Mauchline in East Ayrshire Council, and there are bus services connecting those communities as well.

East Ayrshire again is too large and must lose a ward and the impact of including the Kyle ward in East Ayrshire is that East Ayrshire has to lose two wards. I think we probably all accept that that is unfortunate, I am sure East Ayrshire would rather only lose the one, but the arrangements for East Ayrshire do keep the whole of Kilmarnock together and they do link it with the council's other main town which is Cumnock, and what is proposed keeps together the whole of the smaller recognisable community of Cumnock & Doon Valley which was a council in its own right, and which we see as a coherent unit within East Ayrshire.

If the Kyle ward were to be linked instead with North Ayrshire, which would be possible, it would disrupt the constituency which North Ayrshire sees as its urban core constituency based on Irvine, Kilwinning and Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston. I do not think we may hear from North Ayrshire Council today but I am aware of what they are talking about because I have seen a paper from North Ayrshire Council which I think will go to the Commission eventually. It is consistent, I think, with what North Ayrshire Council said in the fifth review and the Scottish parliament review - I am sorry, that should have been the sixth review – and the Scottish Parliament review and in this review. It very much wants to keep that urban core together, they see that as their main communities. The initial proposals achieve that and while it is the case that the lower quota for the Scottish parliament constituencies means that Stevenston is separated from Ardrossan and Saltcoats in the Scottish parliament, these three towns are very closely linked together. Generally they are referred to by local people simply as the three towns and if anybody in North Ayrshire spoke about the three towns local people would know immediately what that meant. We think that those three towns should be put in the same constituency if that is possible and that they should be linked with Irvine and Kilwinning with which they share so much.

North Ayrshire also has wards which are surplus to the quota and the Commission has proposed to link some of its area with Inverclyde and some with Renfrewshire. Of course North Ayrshire's concern to keep its core urban area in one constituency does not imply any lack of interest in or commitment to the smaller towns in the north of its area. As I said I have seen a paper and I know that North Ayrshire Council is unhappy with the proposal to place its surplus wards separately in two constituencies rather than together in one. While we do not have a counterproposal today to address that we do suggest that the Commission might look at that again and might look at what was proposed in the sixth review when the surplus wards were kept together. We do not think that we can support North Ayrshire's proposal, we think that this is what they will propose, which is to add the Kilbirnie/Beith ward to Inverclyde & Largs and put all of that in Inverclyde because there is a consequential. The consequential is that a ward would then have to come out of Inverclyde and go into Renfrewshire, and we think that that might have some undesirable impact on the town of Port Glasgow. My colleague Mr Green will make some comments on that later today and suggest a different way for the Commission to accommodate what we think is really a legitimate aspiration from North Ayrshire Council.

We think that the Commission is also correct to hold together the urban core of Inverclyde. There have been divisions before but every big urban area wants to be kept intact. We wonder if the sixth review proposals linking Inverclyde with adjoining areas of Renfrewshire were more appropriate and if the Commission decides, having considered representations, that Inverclyde can be divided and should be divided we suggest that the only, I have said: "acceptable view" – maybe that is too strong a word but the best way to do it would be to follow the same boundary as the Scottish parliament constituency follows because that does keep the contiguous urban settlements of Gourock, Greenock and Port Glasgow in one constituency.

Turning to Renfrewshire, we welcome the reunification of Paisley in one constituency. Paisley is an ancient town with an exceptionally strong sense of identity and (this is a personal view) it would have been elevated long ago to city status if it had been a wealthier town and in the east of Scotland. Our only suggested changes in Renfrewshire as both constituencies for Renfrewshire contain electors from neighbouring council areas are that the Commission's naming policy might be amended to make it policy to try to recognise both council areas. We suggest that Paisley and Barrhead, for example, if that is the final constituency, is equally as valid as Inverclyde and Largs, while we suggest that Kilbirnie or Garnock and West Renfrewshire would more accurately describe that constituency and would recognise the presence of its North Ayrshire electors.

We recognise as well that East Renfrewshire Council would have preferred to keep its entire area in one constituency. It is again one of the smaller councils. However, as noted above we do recognise that there is quite an affinity between Paisley and Barrhead & Neilston. We accept the division of a ward to allow Neilston to be linked with Barrhead with which it is intimately connected. It is clearly more related to Barrhead than to Newton Mearns and we think it would certainly have been placed in a ward with Barrhead if it had been possible when looking at local government boundaries for the Local Government Boundary Commission to create five member wards. I do not know if East Renfrewshire Council thinks in the same terms as North Ayrshire but if it did I think it would see its urban core as the large suburban area running from the Glasgow boundary to Newton Mearns. That was contained within the former Eastwood council, it coincides with the Scottish parliament constituency of Eastwood, but in order to accommodate the overall distribution Eastwood has been combined with areas of East Ayrshire and that is an alignment which is as novel as the links proposed now between Inverclyde & Largs and west Renfrewshire, Kilbirnie & Beith. As in the other cases the constituencies are a line along trunk and major roads and in this case an almost new modern motorway which lets us all cross the Fenwick Moor in mere minutes.

Of course as someone rooted in Ayrshire I recognise and my party recognises that there are less direct links between the Irvine valley towns and Eastwood than is the case for Stewarton, Dunlop and Fenwick which are increasingly commuter and retirement communities. They are certainly part of East Ayrshire but very much in the greater Glasgow orbit. But people in the Irvine valley also have to travel outside for work. The volumes of traffic are heavy at peak times on the A719 road linking Galston to the M77, a distance of only 5 miles. We see these communities all as well connected communities and we think that that proposed constituency can work well. There will be over 20,000 electors from East Ayrshire in a constituency of just over 70,000 - 71,000 and we think that the Ayrshire electors will feel that they have a significant influence on the election of an MP for that constituency.

I want to turn now to the name of the constituency because we are not happy with it at all. Names must be relevant to the electors who live in the constituencies and the name Cunninghame East does not apply in any sense to the 51,000 or so electors from the East Renfrewshire or Eastwood part of the proposed constituency. Someone within the Commission is clearly very erudite as there was indeed a sense in which Cunninghame applied once to part of this constituency but no part of Renfrewshire was ever in Cunninghame. The name is unlikely to mean much more today, at least in its original sense, to Ayrshire residents. I am relying quite heavily at this point on the late John Strawhorn's Standard History of Ayrshire which Mr Scott has at the moment and which the Commission secretariat is welcome to borrow and return next week at the Edinburgh hearing. In his account he states that Ayrshire was organised by King David in the 1100s into three county units for law enforcement and tax collection. Nothing changes much, does it? He called these bailleries and he named them Cunninghame, Kyle and Carrick, and even though a shire grieve or sheriff was appointed for Ayrshire in the 1200s bailliery courts and the bailliery names survived until the middle 1600s, until they were superseded by the appointment of sheriff substitutes. The Scottish parliament, the original one, not the current one, created Commissioners of Supply in the late 1600s as prototype county councils and the old bailleries appear to have disappeared then, and I understand that the last Cunningham Earl, died in 1796.

We know that the Commission must have regard to established ties and connections, and as Conservatives of course we approve of that but it does seem excessively zealous to hark back to the 1800s to look for a name for current day constituencies. To be fair to the Commission, the name Carrick has survived very well over the past millennium and Burns of course immortalised the name of Kyle in Rantin' Rovin' Robin, but I would suggest that Cunninghame means only one thing to people alive today. When Willie Ross, an Ayr man well remembered throughout Ayrshire as a long serving MP for Kilmarnock and Secretary of State for Scotland, devised the new structure for local government, the regions and the districts, which was in fact enacted by the following Heath government in the early 1970s, he and his officials had to find names for the new structures and at that point the name Cunninghame was resurrected. It became the name for the local government unit based on Irvine. Cunninghame District is coterminous with today's North Ayrshire Council and the name survives even though the council has been renamed in the Scottish parliamentary constituencies for North Ayrshire. But nobody in the proposed Cunninghame East lives in North Ayrshire, which was Cunninghame District, that is what people today know as Cunninghame. Only around 17,000 of the electors in the constituency live in what even King David in the 1100s would have considered to be Cunninghame because the electors of Galston, Greenholm and Priestland south of the River Irvine live in Kyle in the medieval sense. I suspect that almost none of them know that and that most people would just be bewildered to be told that they live in Cunninghame East.

We note that in all of the models put by the Commission's secretariat to the commissioners themselves they suggested that the constituency be called East Renfrewshire with an additional name to reflect the Ayrshire component coming in and we think that the secretariat was right. (I would say that because they are here today.) We suggest that the commissioners need to look at this name again. For what it is worth we suggest Eastwood as the name for the Renfrewshire portion as people there know what is meant by Eastwood district and it still is Eastwood constituency for the Scottish parliament. Since the 1970s the small towns north and north east of Kilmarnock which were taken into the Kilmarnock district have been recognised by the name Loudoun. It is not an all-embracing name, it applies strictly only to the parish north of the River

Irvine but it has been accepted and it is used in other contexts. Secondary school pupils from the entire valley attend Loudoun Academy. They and their parents might play golf at the ancient Loudoun Gowf Club. Loudoun Castle is still a very prominent local landmark and of course there is of course the iconic Loudoun Hill where the Bruce fought and won his only pitched battle against the English before Bannockburn. (I put that in to appease the SNP and get their support!) The clinching argument has to be that Galston and Newmilns both have a Loudoun Arms while Darvel has a Loudoun Hill Arms so Loudoun is a name which will draw these communities into the new constituency. Speaking entirely, now for myself I can understand an argument that after 40 years or so it might be time to recognise the largest of these towns and to use the name Stewarton. Eastwood, Loudoun & Stewarton would be descriptive and it is a shorter name than some proposed elsewhere such as East Kilbride, Strathaven & Lesmahagow, itself a curious choice given that all three of those towns are in the same council area while larger and more recognisable towns across Scotland have been removed from the political map. Of course Eastwood, Loudoun & Stewarton is a bit of a long name as well. It would be known at once by an acronym like constituencies we all know and refer to as DCT and BRS but at least that would be a lasting memorial to the Boundary Commission who proposed an entirely inappropriate name but then decided to call the constituency something else. Perhaps the councils might be recruited to suggest something which the Commission can accept as a more descriptive and a more relevant name.

To conclude, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party accepts that the six councils can be grouped into seven coherent constituencies each centred round their principal town or towns. We accept the validity of the specific constituencies subject to more accurate naming and perhaps to minor adjustments to address the separation of the two orphan wards in North Ayrshire. We acknowledge that the sixth review constituencies if adjusted might also provide a workable and acceptable basis for distribution and we intend to make a firm recommendation based on a thorough assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of the initial proposals, and any workable counterproposals by the closing date for submissions. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Thank you very much indeed for the historic landscape, it was fascinating. Does anybody have any questions for Murray to answer? Thank you very much indeed. The next on my list is John Scott, MSP.

MR SCOTT: Sheriff Principal, Mr Murray, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. My name is John Scott and I am the Conservative MSP for Ayr constituency which is essentially the towns of Ayr, Prestwick and Troon. Before I became an MSP I was and indeed still am a hill farmer in deepest South Ayrshire growing up in Barrhill in the 1950s and since 1967 farming outside Ballantrae so I know the whole area of South Ayrshire pretty well having lived and worked there man and boy until 1999 when I became an MSP. I am here today to speak in support of the proposed new constituency Ayr & Carrick but before I do I want to start by dealing with the suggestion from the Labour Party that South Ayrshire should be grouped with Dumfries & Galloway. I know that this was proposed in the last review which did not go ahead, although it was not the worst proposal ever made.

If we got a constituency of Galloway, Carrick and South Ayr it could work fairly well and I am sure that people in the different communities would rub along together. But do not be in any doubt that they would be different communities. As a farmer I probably relate more than most people in the Carrick area to the people, at least certainly to the people in the farming community, in

Wigtownshire and Stewarton, and I accept that at least in the farming community there are strong similarities between the two areas. As a Ballantrae resident I acknowledge that I used to go to Stranraer sometimes and use services there which is natural in a small settlement closer to a major town of the neighbouring authority which is closer than the central town in your own authority.

However, people in Barrhill and Ballantrae really look more to Girvan and Ayr for their services and their identity, and indeed always have done, the hills and moors of the most southerly part of Ayrshire and North Wigtownshire where I grew up being a very real and natural boundary, peat bogs abound. While we in Ballantrae might have gone to Stranraer sometimes people from Stranraer rarely come to Ballantrae or Girvan. If they want a day out, a meal and a drink they go to places like Portpatrick and their natural and long term affinities lie with the communities of Newton Stewart, Castle Douglas and Dumfries while most visitors to Girvan and Ballantrae come from South Ayrshire or indeed further north. If you speak to people who are running catering businesses or any service businesses in the Carrick area you will find that their customer base is mainly from South Ayrshire. If you speak to the proprietor of Turnberry Hotel in Carrick, a Mr Trump, you will find that he would not need to build a wall to keep people out from the south but he would see them as a rare, almost exotic but welcome species so if we get linked with Stranraer we will live with it, of course but it is not the natural link. In Carrick we look towards Ayr and as the MSP for Ayr for the last 16 years I can assure you that the people from the whole of South Ayrshire look to Ayr as their focus. In a way it is the capital of South Ayrshire, the seat of local government, the main business centre, the focus of the Burns industry, our principal tourist town and attraction, and home to our three championship golf courses that are all together in this part of South Ayrshire.

For jobs, leisure facilities, entertainment, schools, further and higher education, shopping, football, rugby teams, accountants and solicitors Ayr is the focus of everyday life in South Ayrshire. It is the town of business for South Ayrshire as well as recreation. Of course people go elsewhere. People in Ayr might go to Braehead or Silverburn to shop, just as people from Cumnock & Doon Valley will come to Ayr to shop or have a night out but not many people from Ayr go to Dalmellington or Cumnock to shop or have a night out there because the flow is largely one way and while Ayr is a centre for the whole of Ayrshire, Cumnock & Doon Valley get their services, education, community health, social care, training and housing from East Ayrshire Council, not from the council in Ayr. Lots of people in Ayr have come from different parts of Ayrshire of course and there are family and business links across all of our boundaries but the focus of our lives in South Ayrshire is here and I think that people in Prestwick and Troon, for example, have a far stronger claim to be linked to a constituency with the town of Ayr than people who might come once a week from Cumnock or New Cumnock, or indeed two or three times a year from Stranraer or Newton Stewart. Of course we respect all of our neighbours and we are very happy to see them but we are also people here who know the difference between neighbours and family.

Turning now to our councils I know that there was some controversy about the creation of these three Ayrshire councils a bit before I became involved in politics. There were politicians in Ayrshire who wanted an all Ayrshire council and you would have to ask them for their reasons but the majority of people in South Ayrshire wanted a South Ayrshire council, a successor to Kyle & Carrick district which had exactly the same boundaries. Here in South Ayrshire we are grateful to our colleagues, mostly Labour councillors in Kilmarnock and Irvine who wanted control back of their own areas and worked hard for the creation of North & East Ayrshire. We still have our political

differences but all three councils by and large work well together and pool some services, for example Ayrshire Roads Alliance, just as we share health services with hospitals in Ayr and Kilmarnock serving the whole of Ayrshire. But for our more local services we generally want to run our own affairs and to be represented in the Scottish parliament and the UK parliament by people who stand for their own council areas. Ideally we would have an MP for South Ayrshire but I know that we have too many voters, just as east and North Ayrshire have so we all have to make constituency boundaries fit as best we can.

However, at the moment there is an unreasonable divide within this council area and in the sense of councils we are looking at today we can identify in the existing constituencies: a Kilmarnock constituency with most of East Ayrshire and all of the town of Kilmarnock; a North Ayrshire constituency with most of that council's area; Inverclyde all in one constituency; all of Renfrewshire in two constituencies; and all of East Renfrewshire in one constituency. We are the odd one out, split in two with two of our principal towns, Prestwick and Troon, in an unnatural union with Irvine and Kilwinning and we know that North Ayrshire sees Irvine and Kilwinning, its largest urban area, as the heart of the constituency it wants, not patched together with towns from another council area altogether. I do not know if the Boundary Commission is aware the current constituency boundary splits the town of Ayr but it does and this happened because council ward boundaries were made to equalise areas. Some parts of North Ayr, that is North Ayr and Ayr, were linked with Prestwick in the past and this is still the case today in the multi-member Prestwick ward, and the result of the last review was that every resident of Ayr north of Seaforth Road was put into Central Ayrshire rather than Ayr. At elections we get calls from people who cannot understand this and are really upset that they live in Ayr but do not vote for Ayr's MP. I know that the other scheme which the Labour Party is promoting would split Ayr as well but at least that split would be obvious because I think it runs along the River Ayr and the main roads. The current boundary, however, between Ayr and Ayrshire Central runs through a housing estate, along minor roads and the residents on either side had always previously been in the same area for voting. I do not think that that split is fair on these people and I would plead with the Commission to sort that if they can because my constituents do not understand or like that split for Westminster elections.

Then take Prestwick in my Scottish parliament constituency. I know that Prestwick is Ayrshire's oldest burgh and very proud of its own heritage, and it has its own community councils and secondary school, Prestwick Academy, and local shopping centre. I expect that everyone on the boundary between Prestwick and Ayr knows their own postal address but I defy anyone on the Boundary Commission to go up to Prestwick and identify the boundary on the ground. Since the Heathfield Estate was built up in the 1950s Ayr and Prestwick have been physically linked. They were linked in the same constituency from 1918 until the 2005 election and it is now time to put that link back together. Unlike the links between Ayr and towns in East Ayrshire this is a two-way link. If you are looking for the Ayr-Prestwick boundary you will notice bus after bus taking people in both directions up the main roads between Ayr and Prestwick and if you go to Prestwick train station at any time you will find people waiting to catch trains to Ayr.

There are so many links. Prestwick people shop in Ayr but the reverse is true as well. For example, Ayr people know that Prestwick has one of the best ironmongers in the area. They have an excellent art shop. People from all over Ayr go to Sainsburys at Prestwick Toll, just as Prestwick people go to Tesco or Asda on the Heathfield Road retail park in Ayr. Ayr people play golf on Prestwick's courses

and vice versa. Prestwick people use the Citadel Leisure Centre or the Gaeity Theatre in Ayr while Ayr people can play tennis in Prestwick or go for medical treatment at the Biggart Hospital. Young people from Ayr go to Prestwick for the night life and entertainment, and also people from Prestwick go to the clubs and pubs in Ayr. People in Prestwick drink and eat in Ayr just as people from Ayr might go for a range of fine cafes or restaurants in Prestwick. I do myself; I am a regular customer of Elliot's; I am not sure if I am allowed to advertise here but anyway. I do myself. Of course if you put them in different constituencies people will still lead the same lives but the way you group towns should surely follow the pattern of people's daily lives and not fight against them.

Lastly I would like to talk about Troon, one of the old police burghs created in the late 1800s, not an ancient place like Prestwick but a town proud of its heritage, its shipbuilding and engineering, sadly now long gone, a seaside resort and a centre of excellence for golf. I knock on door after door in Troon in every election and have done so now for five elections, and while I do meet people who have come in from Irvine or Kilmarnock to take advantage of the local schooling or good quality and well priced middle market housing I do not often find that people are leaving Troon to go to Kilmarnock or Irvine. Troon has a great quality of life with a vigorous community and civic life, and while Troon people tend to stay in Troon it is still very much part of South Ayrshire and draws so many of its services from South Ayrshire. Troon too has a vibrant fishing community as well and boats registered in Ballantrae, Girvan, Dunure and Ayr now all fish from Troon for mostly prawns in the Firth of Clyde. Perhaps surprisingly but importantly Troon is the second happiest place to live in Britain according to a recent survey and that in part is because they are content, I believe, with the linkage they have with Prestwick and Ayr, and indeed South Ayrshire.

Like Prestwick, Troon was one of the Ayr burghs linked with Ayr since 1918. Parliamentary boundaries have changed over the years but while Troon has sometimes been put in the same constituency with Irvine I do not believe it has ever been by popular demand. Troon has never been linked with Irvine in local government and it has been in the same district council and then unitary council as Ayr since 1975. Another link is the local press and our local press here in Ayrshire or in this part of Ayrshire anyway is the Ayrshire Post and the Ayr Advertiser. The Ayr Advertiser advertises itself as Scotland's oldest weekly newspaper and in this it is set up to take in Troon, to take in Ayr, to take in Prestwick. I just picked this one up as I came out and there are articles about Girvan, there are articles about Troon, there are articles about Ayr and there are articles about Prestwick, that is the linkage and that is certainly the evidence. Similarly the Ayrshire Post very much deals with South Ayrshire. They have Carrick and they have Troon editions but the whole focus of both of these well regarded local newspapers is that they deal with South Ayrshire. The other parts of Ayrshire have their own newspapers and these are very strong binding factors. I think the Ayrshire Post has a circulation approaching 20,000 and the figures I believe are that every local newspaper gets read by three times the number of people who actually buy it. That means that there is a cohesive factor there with the local press as well.

Going back to my script, no-one in Troon has ever suggested to me that the town should be linked at council level with Irvine rather than Ayr and I do not think that North Ayrshire Council has ever entertained the idea that it should acquire Troon. That is the acid test, really, of where Troon belongs, with South Ayrshire for local government and consequently with Ayr in a parliamentary constituency whenever the complicated game of numbers and balancing out the competing claims of different areas permits it. It has been a great privilege for me as an Ayrshire man from Carrick to

represent these towns which I see as having so much in common, even though they have their own characteristics. It is a natural constituency and these towns are quite distinct from the towns in neighbouring councils. That is why the Labour Secretary of State for Scotland, Willie Ross, MP for Kilmarnock, devised a plan introduced by the Conservative government in the early 1970s to put Kilmarnock, Cumnock and Irvine into their own district councils and the towns of Ayr, Prestwick, Troon, Maybole and Girvan, with their associated villages and rural areas, into one council area. If they belong in the same council area as they have been undisturbed since 1975 the case for putting them in one constituency if it is at all possible is surely overwhelming. Thank you very much.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Thank you very much, indeed, John Scott, for that explanation and how much I am learning about my own area as we go through this exercise. Does anybody have any queries for John? Thank you very much once again for your contribution. Jamie Green. Is Jamie here?

MR GREEN: Good morning. You will be pleased to know I do not have a pre-prepared script. I thought I would just come and share some thoughts with you so I will not take up too much of your time this morning. I apologise to Murray Tosh for missing the beginning of his statement but I know he has submitted that statement in writing and from what I caught of it I think it covers substantially the views of the party that I am an elected member of so I will not dwell too much on the intricacies of his statement. I think there are a lot of very relevant and important facts in there and a huge amount of local knowledge which far surpasses mine. However, what I would like to talk about are my own experiences as someone who was brought up in the Inverclyde area my whole life, I now live in North Ayrshire, and also my experience over the last few years through my political ambitions and progress some general observations on how I think the area is made up, and the feedback I have had. Also I guess, and it may be my naivety, as a new member of the Scottish parliament for the West of Scotland region, is the fact that I have been speaking to other parties on this as well because I think it is an important issue that we get it right for local people so perhaps some of my comments and statements may not necessarily be the voice of the Scottish Conservatives, they may be general observations from people who I have spoken to over the last few days and weeks.

First of all I know North Ayrshire Council are not here and I am not going to speak on their behalf either but I have seen the same document that the others have in terms of their thoughts and views on this, and my initial thought on it is that they have a very valid point. The Cunninghame West seat makes a huge amount of sense to the people of North Ayrshire, it brings the three towns together with Irvine. There is a very natural affinity between those in terms of transportation, jobs and commuting, and also the culture of those towns in the way that people are used to turning to North Ayrshire Council for their services. It also links in the Isle of Arran as well and we know that that affinity and link between Arran and Ardrossan is very important, one that I have come across over the last few years. I should state that I live just outside of Dalry, between Dalry and Kilwinning, so I am very much a member of both those communities and understand the importance of keeping those together. The links between Dalry, Kilwinning and Irvine are very important for people who work and commute between those towns, and also shop as well, and the local media I think reflects that. As John Scott alluded to, the local media is actually a very important link in the way that people perceive their relationship with other towns and villages nearby.

One of the things that I do absolutely share with North Ayrshire Council is they are very sympathetic to the idea that the remainder towns in North Ayrshire Council such as Largs, West Kilbride, Kilbirnie and Beith I think need to stay together, and I think the current proposition that they be split into two different constituencies is a difficult one. There are some reasons for that and I will share those briefly with you. First and foremost I think we have to remember that the link between Largs and West Kilbride is very strong. It is important that they do stay together, and it is good to see that they intend in doing so in the various proposals that people are putting across. But the links between Largs and Greenock are less so. These are two towns which are really only connected by a single track coastal road which is often prone to closure in bad weather and in the winter, and that represents some problems for people. Really there is no other way to get between the two towns. I do that journey often to visit my mother in Gourrock and the only way to get there efficiently and safely is by the Largs coastal road. You very often find yourself in a situation where the barrier is up just as you are exiting Largs and you cannot go any further, so you are talking about linking two towns which are in different constituencies at the moment into one constituency where there is actually a potential for not being able to travel between them at certain times of the year. There are solutions by some of the back roads over the hills but I have to say, I am lucky that I can plough over them in a car with decent sized wheels but there are many people I know who would not be comfortable, especially the elderly and tourists who maybe do not even know those routes or would not be able to find them as they are not the most well signposted routes. There are plan B roads to get between Largs and Greenock but really I have often found myself going from Largs down to Ardrossan and then up the M77 if I want to go through to Glasgow, it is often quicker.

I think, going back to my point about these orphan towns, as we could call them, Kilbirnie & Beith very much is linked to the A737 and again from there it is very easy to get to Largs and West Kilbride so I think that is a natural affinity, to keep those four towns together. I think the big question really that comes up is what do you do with these four towns and I think the proposition in the consultation to split them is not the best route forward. I share North Ayrshire Council's view that you keep them together but their proposition is that they move up into some wider Inverclyde constituency. Again I think that will not work and the reason for that quite simply is I think that will disadvantage Port Glasgow. What that would mean is by having four of those North Ayrshire wards in a greater Inverclyde constituency it would disadvantage half of Port Glasgow because we would lose some of that into Renfrewshire. As someone who went to school in Glasgow, was brought up in Greenock and whose family now lives in Gourrock I know that area very well.

There is a huge natural affinity between Gourrock, Greenock, Port Glasgow and to a certain extent parts of Renfrewshire as well. As we follow that natural A8/M8 road round towards Glasgow my personal view, and it may not be the one that you shared for the party, but I think from where I see it that is a very sensible route. Greenock and Port Glasgow are very much selling themselves as commuter towns for Glasgow so I think that progression up the M8, which is a reliable road for most of it, at least until you get to the airport, makes complete sense. I do not know whether that may then encompass looking at how further parts of that route such as Erskine may form a potential solution, I do not want to make any recommendations in that respect, but I think it is very important that we keep all of Port Glasgow together perhaps with some of the towns in west Renfrewshire as well. Looking at the specific proposals I am uncomfortable with the concept of an Inverclyde & Largs constituency. I think it is not a natural link. I think it is important we keep those four North Ayrshire towns together. My view is that they would be best served perhaps with bringing in some of the

Renfrew towns and forming a part of a Renfrewshire seat rather than a bigger Inverclyde seat, for the reasons I mentioned.

Turning to some of the other recommendations, as has so eloquently been described the Cunninghame East seat is a bit confusing, I think, certainly from a naming point of view. In principle I see that in terms of achieving what it has to there are some positive suggestions in there but I do think perhaps the naming of that could be addressed and I agree with previous comments on that. The Cunninghame West seat as I have said I have a great amount of comfort in and my genuine feeling is that the people in North Ayrshire agree with that. In fact I was sitting in the chamber last night next to my colleague who is the local member for Cunninghame North, my one time foe, Mr Kenneth Gibson, and actually we were surprised to learn that we agreed on that principle, and indeed his wife who is the MP for that area at the moment also agreed. I will not speak on her behalf today but it was nice to know that we shared the ambition that that is what is best for that part of North Ayrshire.

I will not comment too much on some of the other areas in the west region, I think maybe some of that was dealt with in the Glasgow consultation, but on a wider note I think the Paisley concept is a good one. Whether it is Paisley or Paisley & Barrhead is a conversation that could be had. I think that would maybe make people in the Barrhead area feel more inclusive in that it is in the name of that constituency, that might be something to consider. However, overall really as someone who lives in North Ayrshire and covers the Inverclyde and parts of Renfrewshire in terms of my surgeries and my day to day dealings with constituents that is my general impression of how I think these things should pan out. I think it is important that we keep that in the back of our heads that these four North Ayrshire towns will serve better together by staying together but I do not think putting them into Inverclyde is the best answer to that. I would be happy to make some more perhaps written submissions with some specifics on how that may link in to or how I suggest they link into parts of Renfrewshire and create a seat there instead. Perhaps I can do that thereafter.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Thank you very much indeed. Are there any questions for Jamie Green? (Negative) Thank you again. Now John McFadzean. John, you are next on our list.

MR McFADZEAN: Good morning, Sheriff Principal, ladies and gentlemen. My name is John McFadzean, I am currently a serving Conservative councillor for the Irvine Valley ward. I would like to speak in support of the Boundary Commission's proposal to create the new constituency currently referred to as Cunninghame East comprising Eastwood, Irvine Valley and Annick. I believe there already exists a strong community and social cohesion, especially between Eastwood and the new Annick ward, and to a reasonable extent the Irvine Valley. In recent times this has become much more evident and I think this is due to the increasing number of people, especially retired people, moving from Eastwood down to Fenwick and the Stewarton area. The reason for this it would appear is that the people are either looking for a positive financial outcome due to the house price differences or, as I have been told by so many, they are looking for an environment more representative of the smaller Eastwood Mearns they remember from 30 years ago, and in many cases for both reasons. The result in my opinion is an even greater social interaction between the two areas and in some cases I understand this has led to younger family members setting up home in the Annick ward following their parents and grandparents.

When I mention the words “between the two communities” I think it is important to remember that it is only 5 miles from the beginning of one to the end of the other and that that 5 mile gap is filled with a very active rural farming community which link the two areas. This is something I can personally testify to because on an annual basis I “MC” the local farmers show each year and often find myself reading out prize winners and class winners from all of the periphery of Newton Mearns. I understand many people from Fenwick and the surrounding area regularly shop in Newton Mearns and further beyond in Silverburn. Again I meet many people I know in both of these locations. Many people from Annick ward also work in Newton Mearns, Eastwood, Giffnock and beyond, and regularly commute along both the A77 and M77, a very well used traffic corridor that has very recently been updated and links to potential areas very well. The traffic is not only one way. Many people from the Eastwood area use facilities within Fenwick and Stewarton in the Irvine Valley for sporting and social events. The Irvine Valley alone has three very good fisheries, outdoor cross-country running and mud running, shooting clubs, equestrian centres and hotels such as the Fenwick Hotel, a very popular destination. Many of the local cycling clubs based in Annick, the Irvine Valley and Eastwood amongst others use the old A77 as a road race course, bringing the communities closer together and socialising at both ends.

All these examples that I have given foster communication and interaction between these two communities which are growing ever closer, especially when you take into account and consider the linear development either going on or planned at the southern end of Newton Mearns. I am myself an example of what I am talking about. Having been born and brought up in Newton Mearns I now live in Fenwick and have become a councillor in the Irvine Valley ward. I also own and operate a garage business based in Fenwick which is patronised by many people from Newton Mearns. I could go on and on but I believe I have demonstrated the very close links that exist between these two communities which I believe would form a very suitable and workable overall constituency in line with the Boundary Commission’s aims and objectives.

The only part of the proposal that I feel needs altered is the proposed name for the constituency. A name such as Eastwood, Loudon & Annick in my opinion would be much more representative and appropriate. My one last point would be that moving approximately 20,000 people into the combined ward of Eastwood would ensure that Ayrshire people had a very good representation and powerful voice in the new ward which really would not be the case if this number was dramatically reduced. On that basis I believe the Boundary Commission’s proposals should go ahead as they are proposed. Thank you for affording me this opportunity to speak.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Thank you very much, John. Before you leave are there any questions about anything that arose there? Thank you very much for your contribution. Is there anybody else in the room? I think we are having Peter Convery and Hugh Hunter later on today but is there anybody free in the room now who would like to make a contribution of any sort? Yes, sir.

MR FRASER: Yes, Andrew Fraser from North Ayrshire Council.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Please come forward. You said your name was Andrew Fraser from North Ayrshire Council?

MR FRASER: Yes. I am the head of deputy demographic services and I am the returning officer for North Ayrshire Council. The council’s position will be known on 21st December and after that date

we will submit a response to the Boundary Commission. At the present moment the council does not have a position on the Boundary Commission proposals. I know certainly that there was reference made by both Mr Tosh and Mr Green to a paper prepared within North Ayrshire Council. What I can say is that was an informal officers' briefing paper prepared for group leaders and it is not council policy but for the avoidance of doubt I can say that the options looked at in terms of that paper were: firstly, maintaining a constituency within North Ayrshire which served the bulk of its population, and clearly the Cunninghame West ward gives us that; secondly, all things being equal it would be better if North Ayrshire were split in two rather than being split into three; thirdly, we appreciated that any proposal coming forward should aim to have the least possible impact on the boundaries of other constituencies and clearly any resulting constituencies would have to have an electoral quota between 71,000 and 78,000 electors. In terms of that briefing paper there was only one option which complied with that and that was to add Kilbirnie & Beith and the north coast of North Ayrshire in with Inverclyde. That would as has been suggested involve the Port Glasgow ward of Inverclyde moving to the West Renfrewshire constituency. That purely is a paper for discussion and I have honestly no feel as to which way our members will go in December so it is certainly no part of council policy.

We did however look at the option of putting Kilbirnie & Beith and the north coast into West Renfrewshire because we did appreciate the road links are better that way. The road link certainly up the north coast between Skelmorlie and Largs while it is still within North Ayrshire is not good. The difficulty we found with the West Renfrewshire proposal is that wards of West Renfrewshire would have to move into Inverclyde. If you moved the wards, the Bishopton and Erskine & Inchinnan ward into Inverclyde adding a coastal strip it would not result in the electoral quotas being met, and in addition it would also leave the Renfrew ward detached from the remainder of the West Renfrewshire constituency. The alternative would be to move the Johnstone North ward into Inverclyde and again that would split the West Renfrewshire constituency in two. The officers' view was that the Boundary Commission would be unlikely to accept a proposal which had a constituency split in two so that is why that was not put forward in the briefing paper.

I think from a council point of view it is preferable that the number of splits to a local authority is minimised. From a returning officer perspective if your area is divided into three, as North Ayrshire is, it complicates the running of the election. Obviously we will be dealing with a different electoral registration officer. There is the issue about candidates and voters, votes going to the wrong place, having to be essentially distributed three ways, and the fact that probably three different returning officers will be dealing with the organisation of elections in North Ayrshire for the parliamentary election. There are also difficulties in practice sometimes when you have an MP represents the overall interests of a local authority area – it is difficult sometimes where you have an MP split across the local authority areas. Councillors have an obligation to serve the interests of their local authority area as a whole. Clearly where an MP has interests across local authority areas it can be difficult if there is a conflict between those local authorities. I am aware of one which has come up recently. What often happens is that the MP's loyalties are with the local authority area which has the greatest number of electors and that is a particular issue for North Ayrshire. Only 17,000 of the electorate in the north coast I think would form part of the Inverclyde constituency and only 7,000 – sorry only 10,000 on the north coast would form part of the Inverclyde and 10,000 of Kilbirnie & Beith would form part of the West Renfrewshire constituency so Kilbirnie & Beith would be approximately a seventh of the West Renfrewshire constituency.

The final point is the council has not considered the naming of constituencies either in the officers' briefing paper or in the report which will go to council. I note there is a proposal that the name of Cunninghame East should be changed and clearly there is a knock-on issue that if Cunninghame East is changed should Cunninghame West remain Cunninghame West or should the "West" be dropped. I express no view on that but I think the council in December will probably wish to consider that. However, we will respond formally to the Boundary Commission prior to the January deadline.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Thank you very much for giving us a perspective on that from a returning officer. Yes, Murray, Tosh, do you have any questions to ask of Mr Fraser?

MR TOSH: Thank you, Sheriff Principal. Mr Fraser, could I start by saying that if I misinterpreted the paper I can only apologise to you. We have asked our councillors everywhere if they would give us intelligence on what councils are saying because we are very interested in that and if we have misunderstood that paper then that is our fault. I hope that you heard in what I said earlier that we actually do appreciate the dilemma that North Ayrshire faces and we are sympathetic to finding a solution. My question really is this. You referred today to the Port Glasgow ward as the paper did. I wonder if North Ayrshire appreciates that Inverclyde ward 1, which contains Kilmacolm, Quarrier's Village and part of Port Glasgow, is not in fact the Port Glasgow ward, and that Port Glasgow is included in ward 1 and ward 2. I do not know if there is a map here that would show it but if one were available you would see that the railway station in Port Glasgow, the civic core of Port Glasgow, the municipal buildings and so on, and the principal shopping and commercial centre for Port Glasgow are all in ward 2. The knock-on effect of what you are trying to do in the interests of your council, which I understand does divide the town of Port Glasgow, it cuts a residential area essentially away from the civic and commercial part of the town, and we did not feel we could support that, I wonder if your council had quite grasped what it was proposing for Port Glasgow.

MR FRASER: I would certainly say the paper is purely an officers' paper. I am aware that the major groups in North Ayrshire have not yet met to decide their position on it so I certainly would not even put money on this being the council's position. We did map out the electorate so we are aware of the electorate numbers in wards, the ward boundaries, and so on. I have here a map that shows clearly the area. It is a ward of that size of Inverclyde which would need to move into West Renfrewshire to make the numbers balance. But I think if this is the council's eventual position, and I reiterate that it may not be the council's position, then clearly those maps will come to the Boundary Commission.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Jamie, do you have anything to ask on that? You are in fact going to say I suspect that they do not (over talking).

MR GREEN: No. Thank you for the statement you have just made and again I apologise; for the record when I mentioned North Ayrshire I was not referring to any official proposals. It is just as you said certainly some ideas that are being passed around, and rightfully, so to get what is best for North Ayrshire. I am very sympathetic with the view that we should split North Ayrshire into three constituencies and that is something we would absolutely support but I think just the idea that an Inverclyde MP, which is effectively the end result of this, would ultimately be asked to look after places like Beith and Kilbirnie is something which does not make a lot of sense. It seems to me from a community point of view that, I think that the smart people in Port Glasgow who are in the ward 1

towns and Inverclyde have much more in common with the administrative centre in Inverclyde and Greenock than people in Beith & Kilbirnie do – probably they barely travel over to that side.

So I think, just to reiterate what my colleague says, we will absolutely be sympathetic to the idea of keeping those four Ayrshire towns in whichever new constituency they end up in. But, effectively we appreciate you are looking at the technicalities of the effect that putting them into a Renfrewshire constituency what effect that may have on places like Linwood or Renfrew but I think they should be explored further as part as the reviews so my preference would be, I would certainly hope that North Ayrshire Council would look very carefully at a potential recommendation that includes the four North Ayrshire towns with suitable bits of Renfrewshire along that A737 border which makes complete sense really.

MR FRASER: Thank you. It is certainly an obvious option to combine the North Ayrshire northern towns with Renfrewshire rather than Inverclyde. We have done some number crunching on that and clearly that will be an issue for our members at the December council to consider.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Thank you very much indeed for your contribution as well. Is there anybody else who would like address the meeting so their views can be recorded? (Negative) What I suggest we do is we adjourn now until 1 o'clock when I think we have two councillors coming to talk to us and if anybody else wishes to address us then, we will check back at the office, I think, we will check your office to see if there is anybody else wishing to talk. We will adjourn until 1 o'clock. Thank you all very much indeed for your attendance and helpful contributions.

(After the adjournment)

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: We have Peter Convery and Hugh Hunter, so if you would like to come up and speak loudly. Introduce yourselves, please, state your full name and your organisation representation and then you know the proceedings are being taped, and will appear on the website in due course.

MR CONVERY: Sheriff Principal, thank you for allowing us this opportunity to say a few words and I do mean a few words, in relation to the proposed constituency boundary changes for the South Ayrshire area. I have had the privilege of serving as an elected member for Troon in the South Ayrshire Council for the last 18 years. I should say actually at the last look at the boundaries many of us were very disappointed to find ourselves in a constituency that had no connection with the history of Kyle & Carrick, especially for Prestwick, that had no connection with North Ayrshire at all.

There are a couple of things I would say in relation to ourselves. We have excellent bus services. We have four fast trains a day now passing through, trains to Ayr and Glasgow, alongside direct buses to Glasgow. We have good access to Ayr Hospital and the Biggart hospital in Prestwick, both being invaluable given the demographics of our ageing population within South Ayrshire. In terms of population we have been very fortunate. When air traffic control was moved from Manchester some years ago to Atlantic House in Prestwick a considerable number of their traffic controllers moved to Troon, living in Troon but working in Prestwick.

In South Ayrshire we have two strategic sea ports of Ayr and Troon. They are owned and managed by Associated British Ports. Troon processes very large amounts of timber through the timber road relief scheme. Sarah Boyack was the minister at the time actually who initiated that, simply and

mainly because of the fact that the Argyll timber and the roads, as you probably all know, especially around the Rest and Be Thankful, were suffering terribly so what we do have now is a considerable amount of barge timber coming into the harbour. Behind all of that as well is that we have one of the biggest reprocessing wood companies in Britain, might be recycling all of the wood and re-using it, and sending it all over the place. Ayr Harbour generally deals with some of that timber but also brings in a variety of materials such as fertiliser and wind turbines. Both harbours play an important role in our economic programme alongside a considerable amount of jobs as well. Prestwick airport itself -- perhaps Councillor Hunter may mention that -- is strategically important to us, especially in the operation and the number of people who actually work there, whether it is actually in the fire service or in the airport itself. It still is strategically important to us, especially given the fact that there is a possibility that we may be getting the new, what do we call it, spaceport, I think we have a very good chance of picking up something on that.

In terms of housing within Troon we have two major builders in north-east Troon building at the moment 680 houses, very good high quality ones, but more importantly in some ways other than that 100 of those are going to be social rented housing. We have a considerable amount of people who wish to live in our area and many of the new residents have come down from the central belt to live in a pleasurable environment but they are still able to commute very quickly, thanks to the A77 if they were going back into the central belt and using the four fast trains an hour coming from Ayr to Glasgow, so the connectivity that we have is extremely good. From that point of view we believe that the way the plan is at the moment we would fully support it in all shape and form.

There is just one thing. I know you cannot really see this particularly but just to give you a little flavour of Kyle & Carrick, that there is the Troon Times and Prestwick Times. That paper has been manufactured and distributed since 1860 and this one here is the reverse, which is the same company, and it is the Carrick Herald. Those papers actually for many, many years have summed up the quality and the people of South Ayrshire. The last one is the Ayr Advertiser itself which evolved, it is the same paper. On that basis I think I will stop.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Thank you very much indeed, Peter... Can I just make sure for the tape that I have got your name right: It is Peter Convery, is that right?

MR CONVERY: It is.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: And you are a councillor from South Ayrshire Council?

MR CONVERY: I am, indeed.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Thank you very much indeed.

MR TOSH: Could I just ask a simple point?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Of course.

MR TOSH: Peter, we got a bit confused this morning about what North Ayrshire Council was saying and it transpires that they have not said anything yet but what we thought was their view was a briefing paper. Could you maybe just make clear so that we are not making any mistakes here that you are speaking as an individual councillor, you are not speaking for - ?

MR CONVERY: Yes, I am. I am speaking as an individual councillor, I am not speaking on behalf of the council, and I should say actually it is not a grievance in any shape or form about this, I have lots of friends who live in North Ayrshire so it is not a grievance on that basis at all. I do not know if I should really tell you this ---

MR TOSH: Never ask a question unless you know the answer!

MR CONVERY: There is a degree of turbulence at the moment between South Ayrshire and North Ayrshire because Associated British Ports, because of the – you had a P&O terminal which is there, fully built and everything, in Troon port and Associated British Ports are applying to Humza Yousaf for the use of that facility for the Calmac ferry to Arran so there has been a degree of turbulence round about that but a nice turbulence.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Thank you very much. Are there any other questions?  
(Negative) Thank you very much indeed. Right, Hugh, would you come forward, please, and give your full name and your role. You are also a councillor in South Ayrshire, is that right?

MR HUNTER: Yes. My name is Hugh Hunter. Middle name is Ritchie, so Hugh Ritchie Hunter. So, may I first of all thank you for the opportunity to come here and speak to you in my role as an elected member of the constituency of Prestwick. I think it would be fair to say well, pretty outraged and angry last time when we discovered that Prestwick had been separated from the natural home of Ayr and attached to Irvine as part of central Ayrshire. There was a great deal of upset, which would be a mild way of putting it, people could not understand why it had happened. We have nothing but the utmost respect for the people of Irvine and North Ayrshire, they are our neighbours and very good neighbours they are, too but we are part of the family in South Ayrshire and the people of Ayr are our brothers and sisters. The main street through Prestwick is also the main street into the centre of Ayr so it is one street, if you have driven along it you will know that, and unless you were very keen-eyed and spotted the sign you would never know that you had crossed the boundary from one to the other, so incredibly closely linked physically.

The towns are very close, as indeed we are with Troon as well, and perhaps I would just like to try to illustrate the links between the towns, if I may, first of all schooling. The catchment area for Heathfield primary school, which is in Ayr albeit on the boundary with Ayr, also includes a large part of the town of Prestwick, and indeed recently an extension was built to accommodate the additional demand for places and new housing being built in Prestwick. I must also add that Heathfield primary school in Ayr is a feeder school for Prestwick Academy.

Peter spoke about the Biggart Hospital and I will just say a few words about that myself. It is very closely linked with Ayr Hospital, it is all part of NHS Ayrshire & Arran of course, and patients move from one to the other as their needs change, albeit most movements are from Ayr to Prestwick and then to their homes or a homely setting, and this particular hospital is also the hub for community health in Prestwick or Troon. In terms of locality planning, which I am sure you are aware is the in thing just now, community planning and locality planning, Prestwick and Troon share the same community engagement officer who attends the meetings of both locality groups and ensures that each group is aware of what is going on in the other group. Thus we can learn from one another and indeed complement one another.

I want to talk principally about our communities. Last Friday in Prestwick we held our annual Prestwick Cares for Carers Day at Prestwick Academy where we recognise that there are unpaid carers who do work that is often unseen and unlauded. They do not do it for any recognition, they do it because they love the person that they care for. We have a day each year where we bring them together to put on an event for the carer and the person they care for, and it is hosted by Prestwick Academy each year. It was fantastic. People attend that event from Ayr, from Troon as well as Prestwick. It is principally about Prestwick but people attend from both our neighbouring towns.

The airport and the aerospace park are significant employers and of strategic importance to the area. Indeed I would suggest that the aerospace park is a centre of excellence for aerospace engineering and those who are employed there live in Ayr, Prestwick, and some come from wider but by and large they come from the three towns. They come together as a working community for the benefit of all of South Ayrshire and, indeed, the whole of Ayrshire.

Again coming back to the community, in Prestwick we are currently rolling out a community-led initiative to make Prestwick a dementia-friendly town. It is going very well and we are well on our way to achieving that status. One of the initiatives that has arisen from that is that we now have a pop-up community cinema where once a month we meet in the community centre and we screen classic films, and invite along anyone who finds they have a barrier to going to the cinema. There might be something that stops them getting to the pictures; come along, it is a safe place, it is unthreatening, it is relaxed, nobody is going to complain if you make a noise or if you get up and move, go to the toilet, go for a rest somewhere else, all very relaxed. It is aimed at people of Prestwick but once again we are very happy to welcome people from Ayr and indeed the nursing home at Heathfield sends people, so Ayr and Troon come along and enjoy the cinema. We see our community as wider than just Prestwick. In fact it would be the whole of Ayrshire but in practical terms it is very close family in Troon and Ayr.

Golf is a very strong linkage between Troon, Prestwick and Ayr. In South Ayrshire we have seven municipal golf courses and you can buy a season ticket that allows you to use any one of them. Principally, five of the seven are based in Ayr and Troon. There are no municipals in Prestwick but there are five in Ayr and Troon, and they are promoted as a package, people buy their ticket and are encouraged to visit all of them so they work together for the benefit of one another. Within Prestwick we have very serious private clubs, not least Prestwick Golf Club, the home of the Open where the very first Open took place, and of course we have Royal Troon golf course, but there are other private courses like Barassie, the Gailes further north and we have St Nicholas and indeed others further south, Turnberry not least, they all work together to promote one another and promote themselves, so we are very much a family of golf as well and the community comes together to work together.

Up until recently we had a South Ayrshire associated community council. Community councils are very important in our communities probably across Scotland but I know mostly about our local communities. We are very fortunate, we have community activists who are willing to give of their time to serve others and make where we live a better place. These community councils decided, "Look, we all meet individually in Troon, Prestwick, Ayr," and indeed Maybole, Girvan and the other towns, "Why don't we come together? We'll have common problems and we'll have common

initiatives,” and so that is what they did. They came together and they worked together to resolve their problems, and take forward common initiatives. Sadly it is not operational at the minute but I do not think it is beyond the realm of possibility to come back together again. It just goes to show that our communities themselves, it is not Peter, myself, other councillors, communities themselves recognise that they are, and I use the word again, part of a family working together.

Let me give you a personal story. It is just a small thing. One of my relatives got into tracing the family history and we discovered that my six times great grandfather was an apothecary surgeon and was made a burgess of Ayr on 29 September 1715. He was then also made an honorary burgess of Prestwick on 3 July 1733 so the clear linkage between Prestwick and Troon goes back to the middle of the eighteenth century. I have to tell you I can't tell you how chuffed I was when I found that out because I came down from Glasgow 30-odd years ago and did not realise I had any connection, but there you are, burgesses Prestwick and Ayr. What I said earlier, north and East Ayrshire are our neighbours and they are very, very good neighbours but Ayr and Troon are our family, and families should not be broken apart. I very much welcome the Commission's proposals for the Ayr constituency and would encourage you to take them forward on the present basis. Thank you very much.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Thank you very much indeed. Are there any questions for Hugh? You are not going to try another one?

MR TOSH: I have two lines. I wanted to ask if an honorary burgess-ship is coming posthumously?

MR HUNTER: That would be nice!

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ABERCROMBIE: Thank you very much for your contribution. That brings to an end this public hearing. I would like to thank everybody who has participated. I have found it enormously interesting, being part of this sherrifdom and hearing a lot of background information which I was completely unaware of, so from that point of view it has been very personally interesting and I am sure the Commission have lots of interesting facts and figures, and information to take back and think about. Thank you to everybody for participating.

MR TOSH: Thank you for the way you have conducted the hearing today.

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