

THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND

PUBLIC HEARING

2018 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies

Held at:

The City Chambers

14 City Square

Dundee

DD1 3BY

on

Tuesday, 29 November 2016

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL LEWIS

-----

Isabel Drummond-Murray (Secretary)

-----

Daily Transcript by Larking Hodge Pollock (Shorthand Writers)

Suite 6, Legal House, 101 Gorbals Street, Glasgow G5 9DW

DX GW287 Glasgow; T: 0141 248 6211

-----

No of folios: 80

No of words: 5775

Tuesday, 29 November 2016

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL LEWIS: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. May I welcome you to this public meeting. It is one of a series of public hearings that are being held throughout Scotland as part of a review by the Boundary Commission for Scotland of the UK parliamentary constituencies in Scotland. My name is Marysia Lewis, I am the Sheriff Principal of Tayside Central and Fife. I have been appointed to chair this hearing. I am entirely independent of these proceedings and indeed of the Boundary Commission for Scotland. Some of you in this room have not previously participated in a review of constituencies. For those who do have prior knowledge of this process please bear with me.

The public hearing is an important part of a 12 week consultation period on the Commission's initial proposals for constituencies. The proposals were published last month and they appear on the website of the Commission along with an explanatory booklet, maps and a great deal of other

material. I understand that the material has been spread out on the table over to my right, your left. The purpose of this hearing is firstly for the Commission to explain its proposals and then, secondly, to provide an opportunity for members of the public and the qualifying parties to make comments or representations about any of the Commission's initial proposals for the constituencies in Scotland.

It is important that I explain to you, ladies and gentlemen, my role in chairing this hearing. It is to determine the procedure that we are going to follow, to ensure that the legislation is followed, and to ensure that all those wishing to speak and to make representations are able to do so. Given the relatively low numbers here today I intend within reason to adopt a fairly flexible and informal approach. I will shortly be inviting the Secretary of the Boundary Commission to make an opening statement explaining the proposals of the Commission and after that I will invite comment from those who have already indicated their intention to attend this public hearing, and who have indicated that they wish to address the hearing. So far I have four names on the list; there may be others from those who have just arrived. That does not mean to say that others present today are excluded from making representations, they may do so. I will shortly ask those who have just arrived if they wish to make oral representations. No? Thank you for that.

Ladies and gentlemen, as the room is not crammed full of people wishing to make oral representations I will not allocate rigid time slots. That originally was my intention, I will not do so, but this is subject to a caveat that if I think the speaker is going on for a bit too long I will stop them. I will allow you to draw matters to a conclusion yourselves rather than being very abrupt but you will know when I am getting agitated. Oral evidence will be given from the lectern and if anyone in this room has any difficulty in hearing could you please indicate immediately, and we will do what we can to remedy that situation. As soon as you approach the lectern and microphone could you please state your full name, and identify whether you are acting in a representative capacity. You will see from the equipment in this room that the proceedings are being recorded. A transcript of the proceedings will be placed on the Commission's website along with copies of all representations made during this initial consultation period. In other words, the representations will be placed in the public domain for wider circulation.

There will be a four week period of secondary consultation and an opportunity will be given for people to make further observations to the Commission on any of the material and representations submitted. There will then be a third opportunity because after this secondary consultation period the Commission will consider all of the evidence before it and if it thinks appropriate it will revise its proposals. All of this process is set out in the documents which have been issued by the Commission so I will not say anything else about that part of the process, it is there for everyone to read.

I do have to make one thing very clear, ladies and gentlemen. The hearing is not the appropriate forum to challenge, discuss or debate the legislation. The legislation sets out the requirements, you may or may not agree with that, but that is not what is up for discussion today. Speaking at this hearing is but one of the ways in which an individual or an organisation can make representations, whether in support of or in opposition to the proposals. There are other methods, for example making written representations, sending an email to the Commission or using the consultation area of the Commission's website. This initial consultation period will run from 20 October 2016 through to 11 January 2017.

Ladies and gentlemen, that part of my role has now concluded and accordingly I will invite the Secretary of the Commission to address you.

MS DRUMMOND-MURRAY: Thank you very much. I am Isabel Drummond-Murray and I am the Secretary of both the Boundary Commission for Scotland and the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland, and this is new to me as well. With apologies to those of you who were in Glasgow I am going to make a short statement, the first part of which will be about the legislation and you will have heard before, and the second part about the specific proposals that are the focus of this hearing.

The legislation governing the review is the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986. The Act has been substantially amended by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011. As a result of the change there will be a UK parliament of 600 constituencies, down from 650. In Scotland there will be 53 instead of the current 59. Two constituencies in Scotland are specified in the legislation, Western Isles and Orkney & Shetland. Each of the other 51 must have an electorate within 5 per cent of the electoral quota and that quota is 74,769.2 for this review. This means that each 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 lower than 95 per cent if it is not reasonably possible for it to comply with the requirement, and no constituency can exceed 13,000 square kilometres.

In 2011 we commenced our sixth review of UK parliament constituencies. However, parliament amended the legislation governing that review in January 2013 and as a result we stopped work, and did not complete it. This is therefore the first review to which specific numerical limits have been applied to the electorate over the geographical area of constituencies. The legislation states we may take into account factors other than electorate, namely special geographical considerations including the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency, the boundaries of council areas and electoral wards, the existing UK parliament constituency boundaries and any local ties that may be broken by changes. We are aware that the Scottish government has introduced new ward boundaries in many council areas in Scotland. However, the legislation requires us to have regard to the ward boundaries that were in use at the last local government elections and we cannot therefore take account of new ward boundaries at this stage but we can of course take account of local ties.

When designing constituencies we have aimed to design as many as practicable that do not cross a council area boundary. We have also tried to avoid breaking local ties and taking into consideration local geography such as transport links, electoral and administrative boundaries and natural features, and we have taken into consideration special geographical considerations where appropriate. As part of the review we must also recommend a name for each constituency and designate it as either a county or burgh. That designation affects the expenses allowable at elections. The guidelines we have adopted when proposing names are as follows: to use an existing name where a successor is recognisably similar; to prefer short names rather than attempt to describe an area exhaustively; to ensure the names of UK parliament constituencies in general differ from those of Scottish parliament ones where an appropriate and distinct alternative is not 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 like East Lothian or East Kilbride; 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 they can be found on the website.

As an independent and politically impartial body we do not take into account patterns of voting or the results of elections when reviewing boundaries nor do the political parties' views on 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 constituencies for groups of council areas which can be exactly covered by a whole number of constituencies. The strict limit on the number of electors I referred to earlier in each constituency means that the design of each may then affect the design of a number of others across a wide area. We also considered whether to design any 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 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 are divided between constituencies out of 353 wards in Scotland. There are 13 constituencies which contain only whole wards, 23 containing a number of whole wards and part of one ward, 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.

Moving on to the proposals for this hearing, the council areas that form the geographic focus today are Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Dundee City, Fife, and Perth & Kinross, but as I said before 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 12 constituencies.

Aberdeen City council area contains two, Aberdeen North and Aberdeen South. The proposed constituency boundary follows ward boundaries within Aberdeen City council area with one exception, ward 7, Midsocket/Rosemount where the boundary follows the existing UK parliament constituency boundary.

Aberdeenshire, Angus and Dundee City council areas together are covered by five constituencies and aim to retain a constituency similar to the existing Banff & Buchan one, and not split towns between constituencies. Banff & Buchan and Gordon & Deeside are both wholly within Aberdeenshire Council area. Both follow ward boundaries with two exceptions, ward 8, Mid Formartine where the boundary follows the existing UK parliament constituency boundary, and ward 9, Ellon and District, where the boundary follows the community council boundary.

Kincardine and Angus East follows ward boundaries in Aberdeenshire and Angus council areas with one exception. Angus ward 6, Abroath West & Letham is divided by following a community council boundary. This boundary borders Angus Glens and Dundee East which follows ward boundaries in Dundee City and Angus council areas.

Dundee contains six wards from Dundee City council area. Fife and Perth & Kinross council areas together are covered by five constituencies, three wholly within Fife, one wholly within Perth & Kinross, and one containing part of both council areas. This group of constituencies contains one

ward that is divided between constituencies, that is Fife ward 23, Buckhaven, Methil & Wemyss Villages.

Perthshire constituency lies entirely within Perth & Kinross council area and comprises wards 1-5 and 10-12, and includes the city of Perth. Kinross-shire and Cowdenbeath constituency contains Perth & Kinross, wards 6-9 and Fife wards 7-10, and includes the settlements of Kinross, Cowdenbeath, Crieff and Burntisland.

Dunfermline constituency comprises wards 1-6 of Fife council area including the settlements of Kincardine, Saline and Aberdour. Glenrothes and Kirkcaldy constituency contains Fife wards 11-16 in their entirety and part of ward 23 to the west of Buckhaven. North East Fife constituency contains Fife wards 17-22 in their entirety and part of ward 23 to the east of Wemyss.

I was going to go on to talk about the consultation procedure but I think actually Sheriff Principal Lewis covered most of that in her remarks, just to say that the consultation does not close until 11 January and you can get in touch with us by email, in writing or on the consultation portal. Our privacy policy is that we will publish names of individuals and organisations who comment on our proposals but we will not publish personal contact details such as addresses, phone numbers and email addresses. You will also find on our website minutes and meeting papers from the meetings leading up to the publication of our proposals and those include information on alternative constituency designs which have been considered before the Commission decided its initial proposals.

Finally, after the consultation closes we hope in early spring to publish on the website all the comments received and the transcripts from the hearings. There will be a scrutiny period of four weeks during which you can look at those comments and remark upon them, and after that we will consider all the comments and remarks received and produce revised proposals if necessary later in 2017 for further consideration. The final point is we must submit our report containing final recommendations to the Secretary of State before 1 October 2018. That concludes my statement.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL LEWIS: Thank you very much. So far I have had intimation of four people who wish to address this hearing. The order will be as follows, first of all Willie Rennie, then Murray Tosh, Alex Stewart and Andrew Bowie. After that I will check once again whether or not anyone else in this room wishes to address the hearing. Mr Rennie, if you could come forward, please, and remember the instructions to state your full name and whether you are here in a representative capacity.

MR RENNIE: I am Willie Rennie, I am the Member of the Scottish Parliament for North East Fife and I am here representing the Liberal Democrats. Thanks to Sheriff Principal Lewis but also to the Commission as well for setting out so clearly what the rules are for today. We broadly welcome the proposals as set out for this hearing that covers all these areas that were listed. I think we regard traditional communities as incredibly important alongside all the other factors that were set out today. We have two specific issues, however, that we wish to raise, one to do with the north east of Scotland round about the Gordon & Deeside seat, and the Kincardine and Angus East seat, so one comment on that, and then I have some comments to make about the boundaries with North East Fife.

We think it makes sense to put Banchory in with Kincardine and Angus East. Banchory was one of the traditional burgh towns for Kincardineshire alongside Stonehaven, Inverbervie and Laurencekirk so we think it makes sense to have that as part of that community alongside the Angus East area. We also think it would make sense, rather than the title of Gordon & Deeside, to be called Gordon & Upper Deeside which is more geographically accurate for the area. That is my observation about the north east of Scotland.

With Fife we welcome the retention of North East Fife as a constituency based around St Andrews and Cupar. There have been various attempts over the years to slice up the constituency and it has been resisted quite considerably by the local community who see that as a distinct part of Fife, distinct from the other areas within the old kingdom. There was an attempt within Falkland and the Howe of Fife to put that in with Glenrothes but also there were some decades ago some attempts with regard to Dundee and the north end of Fife, and although there is a travel to work area associated between the two the geographical and cultural differences are quite significant, so we agree with the retention of North East Fife as an entity. Our question is around the size of the constituency because on the sixth review the predicted electorate for the North East Fife constituency and the Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes constituency were broadly similar at 80,156 for North East Fife, and 79,342 so marginally smaller for Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes but broadly similar; whereas the differences between North East Fife and Glenrothes are quite significant with the seventh review. The numbers for North East Fife are 79,600 and the now Glenrothes and Kirkcaldy seat 71,677, so quite a significant difference between the two constituencies, but we have a solution for how this could be resolved.

There is a split in ward 23, the Buckhaven/Methilhill/East Wemyss ward. In the sixth review it was recommended that the boundary for the constituency boundary should be between Methil and Buckhaven but the seventh review has recommended between Buckhaven and East Wemyss. We would recommend going back to what the sixth review had recommended which would equalise the two constituencies together. The numbers would be in broad terms 74,099 for North East Fife and 74,542 for the Glenrothes and Kirkcaldy seat; although North East Fife would be smaller it would still be broadly similar to the Glenrothes and Kirkcaldy seat. Regarding splitting that ward there is no natural boundary between any of them. You have one catchment for the new Levenmouth Academy, the new school that has been built there recently, that covers all of those communities. Whether you split it between Buckhaven and Methil or Methil and East Wemyss it makes no difference, you are still splitting the catchment area for the school and if that is regarded as a community then it is of no consequence. Community councils are separate. Buckhaven is separate from Methil and Methilhill, and just in passing all of those are not active community councils, whatever way you split the boundary you are not necessarily keeping communities together. Parity we would regard as an important factor within that and that is why we would recommend splitting between Methil and Buckhaven rather than Buckhaven and East Wemyss.

Those are the proposals that we have and the suggestions that we have for today round about the north east with regard to Banchory and the name of the constituency, and then North East Fife in terms of parity with Glenrothes and Kirkcaldy.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL LEWIS: Thank you very much, Mr Rennie. I do not have any questions for you. Does anyone in the audience have any questions for Mr Rennie? No. Thank you very much. Mr Tosh.

MR TOSH: Good morning, everyone. My name is Murray Tosh and I represent the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party at this hearing and indeed all of the hearings. Today I am going to present an interim response to the proposed constituencies which are the focus of this 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 which we will do by the 11 January deadline. Just by way of example, departing from the prepared statement, the suggestion just made by Mr Rennie is not one that we had considered. Obviously we would look at that before we took a view on it, if indeed we do take a view on it, so the process is a bit of a dynamic process in that sense.

I am able to say today, however, that we are currently inclined to accept the Commission's proposal to group Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Angus and Dundee councils to form constituencies. The rules for distribution of seats in Schedule 2 of the 1986 Act require the Commission to take into account local government boundaries and we agree that it has done so here by allocating two constituencies to the City of Aberdeen and five to the grouping of Aberdeenshire, Angus and Dundee, thereby minimising the crossing of council boundaries. In that latter grouping we consider that the Commission has made the correct choice from the options it considered in its issues paper which was option 1. Option 2 divided the town of Arbroath and while we accept that towns sometimes must be divided to achieve parity we see this division as an unnecessary one. Option 3 merged Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire wards, and crossed the council boundaries when it was not necessary to do so, and therefore we do not favour it.

Within Aberdeenshire we have received representations about boundaries in the vicinity of Banchory. My colleague Alexander Burnett MSP wishes to make a counter-proposal but regrets that his parliamentary commitments prevent him from attending here today and, as he does wish to speak in support of this counter-proposal, he will do so at the Edinburgh hearing. His representations will appear on the Commission's website and interested parties will be able to see and comment on what he has proposed. He thought it only proper to give notice here today of his intention to do so.

Within the City of Aberdeen we have received representations that the Midstocket area would be placed better in Aberdeen South based on community considerations. My colleague Ross Thomson MSP is in a similar position to Mr Burnett. He is working on a counter-proposal which again will be internal to the council in question and will neither upset the groupings nor put the constituencies in question above or below quota, and we ask the Commission to give both proposals careful consideration when they are brought forward. We propose no changes at present to the proposed constituencies in Angus or Dundee.

Before I turn to the remaining proposed constituencies which are the focus of today's hearing I want to make a general point about the grouping of councils. The third and fourth reviews were based on the former regional councils when the only councils ever grouped were Lothian and Borders, and then only in the fourth review, but after the creation of the unitary councils in the 1990s, the unitary councils being generally much smaller than the old regional councils, most councils subsequently



have had to be grouped. In the fifth review and in the unconcluded sixth review the Scottish Conservatives were content with the groupings used. We are aware, however, that in the first review of Scottish parliamentary constituencies the Scottish Labour Party challenged the proposed groupings and was able to persuade the Commission to issue revised proposals which radically reorganised all of the councils in the west of Scotland except in Glasgow and Inverclyde, and we note from Mr Roy's statement for the Labour Party in Glasgow last week that the Scottish Labour Party again will seek amended groupings in this review, though not necessarily in this area, that was not specified.

We are inspired by the Scottish Labour Party, something I never thought I would ever say, to suggest ourselves that the Commissioners should consider workable alternative groupings which they might not previously have had the opportunity to consider. We note that the grouping of Clackmannanshire and Fife proposed in the sixth review now has a combined entitlement to 4.08 constituencies, that the sixth review grouping of Perth & Kinross and Stirling councils no longer works but combined with Falkirk has an entitlement to 3.83 constituencies, which is just within the acceptable limits, while a combination of all four councils would have an entitlement to 7.91 constituencies, again well within the acceptable limits. Further, we note that the Commission had considered but decided against a grouping of North Lanarkshire, Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire with a combined entitlement to 6.23 constituencies. It might be that the Commission would reconsider that decision now given the reaction to the very large and congested constituencies which have been proposed in Lanarkshire where the larger towns are being divided and longstanding linkages broken. We also note that a grouping of North Lanarkshire, Falkirk, Stirling and Perth & Kinross councils would have a combined entitlement to 7.17 constituencies, again comfortably within the acceptable limits.

We are aware of objections to the initial proposals both from Stirling, which would be divided between two constituencies, and from the southern part of Perthshire whose residents see little in common with communities to the east of Dunfermline. My colleague Alexander Stewart MSP will discuss some of those concerns and objections. We recall that there was little if any adverse comment in the sixth review on the proposed grouping of Stirling and Perth & Kinross on the one hand, or Fife and Clackmannanshire on the other, and the Commission has already proposed to link Stirling with Falkirk so at present we are modelling possible constituencies across mid Scotland and Fife and we are looking at a range of possible workable outcomes.

Even with the licensed software made available to political parties by the Commission we are finding the modelling process a complex and protracted one. At this stage I can say only that we do not anticipate seeking any alteration to the proposed Perthshire, North East Fife or Glenrothes and Kirkcaldy constituencies but we do expect to bring forward counter-proposals for the remainder of Fife and Perth & Kinross as well as Stirling and Falkirk, and possibly North Lanarkshire. In that context we will watch with interest how the Scottish Labour Party develops its own proposed groupings. We may be able to develop firmer counter-proposals for the Edinburgh hearing which will consider the proposed constituencies in the Forth Valley. Again as our counter-proposal will impact on some of the constituencies before this hearing we thought it proper to give notice here of our intention.

In conclusion the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party accepts the north eastern groupings proposed by the Commission; agrees that two constituencies can be formed from the City of Aberdeen but with balancing internal adjustments which we will propose between the two constituencies; agrees that five constituencies can be formed from Aberdeenshire, Angus and Dundee, again subject to an internal adjustment which we will bring before the Edinburgh hearing; and we will bring forward counter-proposals for Clackmannanshire, Fife, Falkirk, Perth & Kinross and Stirling councils, and possibly also for North Lanarkshire. I am very sorry that I had not anticipated there would be so much time available or I would have prepared a much longer statement to entertain you this morning!

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL LEWIS: Thank you very much, Mr Tosh. I do not have any questions. Does anyone in the audience? No. Thank you very much, Mr Tosh. Ladies and gentlemen, we now move on to Mr Stewart.

MR STEWART: Thank you, Sheriff Principal. Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I am Councillor Alexander Stewart, a Conservative councillor. I have been elected to Perth & Kinross council since 1999 and I will continue in that role until May 2017. In May 2016 I became a regional member for Mid Scotland and Fife for the Scottish parliament and today I would like to talk specifically on the proposals for the constituency of Kinross-shire and Cowdenbeath. I must say at the outset that I do question this proposal. I think trying to bring together two very different communities across that piece does give us some real cause for concern. The issues that face towns like Kelty, Lochgelly and Cowdenbeath are entirely different to those that face smaller towns and villages in Crieff, Auchterarder and Muthill across Perthshire. Kinross-shire itself in fact has never been paired with any part of any parliamentary constituency in Fife since we started sending representatives to the UK parliament in Westminster in 1710.

I do not believe these proposed boundary changes are in the best interests of the local representation and there is no natural economic or historical affinity between the areas of south and west Perthshire, and Fife itself. There are between these two areas quite poor transport links across the piece and that would cause us some concern as well. The day to day issues facing rural Perthshire are very different to those in the densely populated areas of south Fife and trying to merge two areas into one parliamentary constituency would in my opinion be quite difficult to achieve.

It is essential that parliamentary constituencies allow for effective representation and I believe that in this regard the current proposals fail to serve communities both in central Fife, Kinross-shire and south Perthshire. While I note that the Commission has strived to ensure a roughly equal split of population between the two council areas that form the constituency, given the fact that there is a considerably higher level of population and deprivation that falls within central Fife compared to Kinross-shire and southern Perthshire I am very concerned that the issues faced by the communities in central Fife would dominate the area and the member him- or herself. That would in my opinion be unrepresentative of the people of Perthshire south and Kinross-shire. I would however support personally linking southern Perthshire and Kinross-shire because these do have some natural affinity and the links across the A9 corridor and the A85 have in the past proved to be very useful, and there have been real opportunities across that area because of the links that take place.

Ladies and gentlemen, those are my views and my opinions on where we stand at this present time. I think there are some opportunities across these constituencies but the specific one here for Kinross-shire and Cowdenbeath I do believe is not representative of the areas and the people within these communities. Thank you very much.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL LEWIS: Thank you. I have no questions for Mr Stewart. Does anyone? No. Thank you very much. Finally, Mr Bowie.

MR BOWIE: Good morning. My name is Andrew Bowie and I am here to read a statement on behalf of the north east of Scotland Conservative MSPs. They are Alexander Burnett, Ross Thomson, Alex Johnstone, Liam Kerr and Peter Chapman. On the whole the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party in the north east of Scotland are largely in favour of the proposed changes in the region with a couple of exceptions but I will leave the Midstocket in Aberdeen City change to one side for today and concentrate on the change in Gordon & Deeside.

It is in our opinion plain wrong to exclude Banchory & District from the proposed Gordon & Deeside constituency. Banchory has long been seen as the gateway to Royal Deeside. It is linked by culture, history and geography to the other towns and villages in the area, Inchmarlo, Kincardine O'Neil, Aboyne, Ballater, Strachan, Finzean and Braemar. Deesiders feel a strong sense of community and the uniqueness that comes with being clustered along that long valley that stretches from the Cairngorms to the outskirts of Aberdeen and being on Deeside has a significant economic impact with the thousands of tourists that flood the area each year, choosing to base themselves at what they see as the heart of Royal Deeside in Banchory. If the town was removed, albeit in name only, from the rest of Deeside there are very real concerns from local business owners about the effect that this might have, with the fear that tourists might decide to base themselves further up the Dee Valley and bypass the town altogether.

Geographically it makes little sense if redrawing the boundaries to include Banchory in Kincardine and Angus East and not in Gordon & Deeside, separated as it is from the Mearns by a ridge of hills and forest and connected to it by only two roads, the infamous Cairn o' Mount Road and the Slug Road to Stonehaven. Some, indeed Willie Rennie has this morning, point to the historical links that Banchory has with Kincardine, indeed many in the town still include in their addresses Kincardineshire. However, it might be useful for the Commission to note that this is simply down to a quirk of history and a historical accident relating to land ownership.

On an administrative level, too, there are serious issues to consider. At present Banchory falls within the Marr area committee of Aberdeenshire Council. In splitting the town from the rest of Marr this would mean that the Marr area would be for the sake of one town split between two MPs which would make the administration of the area, whilst not impossible, certainly more difficult. At the other end of the proposed Gordon & Deeside constituency there are also issues around Aboyne with local residents concerned that the proposed boundary cuts across the catchment area for Aboyne Academy. With our proposed adjustments moving the proposed boundary southwards to include all of Banchory and district that catchment would land in one constituency and relate to one MP.

In the opinion of the north east of Scotland Conservative MSPs adjusting the boundaries of the proposed Gordon & Deeside constituency to include Banchory & District makes perfect sense for both geographical and administrative reasons. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL LEWIS: Thank you, Mr Bowie. I have no questions. Does anyone in the audience? Thank you very much, Mr Bowie. One last call around the room for this session. Does anyone else wish to address this hearing? On the basis that no-one has twitched I will adjourn this session until 1.15 so thank you all very much for your participation.