

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Community Participation Committee: 19 November 2008

Subject: Scottish Parliament Constituency Boundaries

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The Committee, at its meeting on 17 September 2008, requested a background report on the current proposals to amend the constituency boundaries for the Scottish Parliament.

2. Background

- 2.1** Legislation provides for regular reviews of constituency boundaries and the new boundaries will be in effect for the next Scottish Parliament elections to be held in May 2011. Reviews are carried out by the Boundaries Commission for Scotland.
- 2.2** The Commission published its provisional proposals for the review on 14 February 2008. These proposals advertised in the local press and notices with explanatory information were lodged for consultation in council offices and main libraries. The proposals were submitted to Council at its meeting of 27 February. They comprise:-
- 1) linking two of West Dunbartonshire's wards, Clydebank Central and Clydebank Waterfront, with part of the Renfrewshire Council area to create the North Renfrewshire and Clydebank Burgh Constituency; and
 - 2) joining the Kilpatrick Ward with Dumbarton, Lomond and Leven wards and two wards of Argyll and Bute Council to form the Dumbarton and Helensburgh County Constituency.
- 2.3** The Council duly objected to the proposals for both constituencies on the grounds that Kilpatrick Ward should not be split from the other two Clydebank wards and that the linking of Clydebank Central and Clydebank Waterfront wards with areas in Renfrewshire Council was anomalous and unacceptable.
- 2.4** Where a local authority submits an objection to a proposed boundary, a Local Inquiry must be held. The Local Inquiry for the West of Scotland was held in two stages – the first in Paisley on 26 and 28 August and the second in Clydebank on 1 and 2 September 2008. Details of the Inquiry were sent out to all objectors to the proposals and were advertised in local newspapers, in the Council offices and local libraries.

- 2.5** The Council was one of a number of objectors who made submissions to the Inquiry before Sheriff Principal Kerr, acting as Assistant Commissioner. Renfrewshire Council also formally objected to the proposals.
- 2.6** Both stages of the Inquiry were well attended by local politicians, members of local organisations and the public. The Clydebank meeting was particularly well attended by local people who made their opposition to the proposals known.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The Council has robustly opposed the Commission's proposals on the grounds that it is not appropriate to create a cross-Clyde constituency nor to include the Kilpatrick ward into the new proposed Dumbarton and Helensburgh constituency.
- 3.2** The Council was unanimous in its opposition to the proposals and the submission to the Inquiry was prepared jointly between the Leaders of both main political groups.
- 3.3** The Council has argued that the status quo should remain, but with the option of including the whole of Bearsden ward into the Clydebank and Milngavie constituency rather than just part, as at present.
- 3.4** The next stage is for the Assistant Commissioner to submit his report on the outcome of the inquiry. It must be noted, however, that the Commission is not bound to accept these recommendations. The final approval of the proposals lies with the Westminster Parliament.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** There are no personnel issues arising from this report.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** If the Boundary Commission's proposals are approved, the costs to the Council of running Scottish Parliament elections will be reduced as the Council's Chief Executive, as Returning Officer, will be responsible for only one constituency instead of two. Although the costs of Scottish Parliament elections are largely met by the Scotland Office, there are many hidden costs which are borne by the local councils who run the elections.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** There are risks for the electoral future of Clydebank if the Boundary Commission's proposals are unchanged.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1** The Council and the local community have clearly expressed their opposition to the Boundary Commission's proposals. No further action can be taken until the results of the Inquiry are known.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1** It is recommended that the contents of the report be noted and that the Committee be advised of the results of the Inquiry when these are known.

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Date: 29 October 2008

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Background Papers:

Scotland Act 1998
Scottish Parliament (Constituencies) Act 2004
Letter dated 7 February from the Boundary Commission for Scotland with proposals for the review
Report by the Chief Executive to West Dunbartonshire Council on 27 February 2008 and minute thereof
Letter dated 7 July 2008 from the Boundary Commission for Scotland with the timetable for the local inquiries
Report by the Chief Executive to West Dunbartonshire Council on 27 August 2008 and minute thereof

Wards Affected: All wards