

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council: 27 February 2008

Subject: Review of Constituency Boundaries for the Scottish Parliament

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To advise of the Boundary Commission for Scotland's provisional proposals for the review of Scottish Parliament Constituencies and to recommend the making of representations to these proposals.

2. Background

- 2.1** The Boundary Commission for Scotland is responsible for reviewing the boundaries of constituencies and regions for the Scottish Parliament in terms of the Scotland Act 1998 as amended by the Scottish Parliament (Constituencies) Act 2004. The review includes provision for consultation with the public. The Commission published its provisional proposals for Scottish Parliament Constituencies on 14 February 2008. A copy of the Statutory Notice is attached as the Appendix to this report.
- 2.2** The Review covers 71 out of 73 constituencies, excluding Orkney and Shetland, each of which by law must be a separate constituency. The rules require the Commission to design constituencies where the electorate is as close to the electoral quota as is practical. The electoral quota is the average electorate per constituency at the start of the review – 54,728.
- 2.3** The Commission advises that it has adopted the undernoted principles in creating constituencies as part of its review :-
- constituencies will be wholly contained within a single council area wherever practicable;
 - the Commission will try to recognise existing community ties;
 - local geographies of the area will be taken into consideration (for example transport links, electoral wards and existing constituency boundaries); and
 - special geographical considerations will be considered where appropriate
- 2.4** Representations on the proposals must be received by 14 March 2008. This is a statutory deadline.
- 2.5** At present, the West Dunbartonshire Council area is split between two Scottish Parliament Constituencies – the Dumbarton Constituency and the Clydebank and Milngavie Constituency. Both are within the West of Scotland Region, and are county constituencies. They are made up as follows:-

Constituency	Composition	Electorate July 2007
Dumbarton	West Dunbartonshire Council wards 1,2,3 Argyll and Bute Council wards 9, 10,11	54,603
Clydebank and Milngavie	West Dunbartonshire Council wards 4, 5, 6 East Dunbartonshire Council wards 1, 2	49,252

3. Main Issues

3.1 The Boundary Commission for Scotland's provisional proposals for West Dunbartonshire Council are as follows:

Constituency	Composition	Electorate July 2007
Dumbarton and Helensburgh County* Constituency	West Dunbartonshire Council wards 1, 2, 3, 4 Argyll and Bute Council wards 10, 11	57,040
North Renfrewshire and Clydebank Burgh* Constituency	West Dunbartonshire Council wards 5, 6 Renfrewshire Council wards 1, 2(part), 4 (part), 10 (part) and 11	56,360

*(*Note – the difference between a County and a Burgh constituency relates primarily to election expenses. Burgh constituencies are traditionally smaller in area, so election expenses there are set at a lower rate.)*

3.2 This provisional proposal makes a dramatic change in that the two most populous Clydebank wards - ward 5, Clydebank Central, and Ward 6, Clydebank Waterfront - would become part of the North Renfrewshire and Clydebank Constituency, being joined with an area of Renfrewshire including Erskine, Bishopton and part of Renfrew.

3.3 The proposal is for Ward 4, Kilpatrick (currently within the Clydebank and Milngavie Constituency) to be incorporated into the new Dumbarton and Helensburgh Constituency, effectively splitting Clydebank.

3.4 While the Returning Officer role for the Dumbarton and Helensburgh Constituency is likely to remain with West Dunbartonshire, it is almost certain that the Returning Officer role for the other constituency would pass to Renfrewshire Council, which has the greater electorate in the area.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 There are no direct personnel issues involved in this proposal other than for the Returning Officer of West Dunbartonshire Council, who would not be required to recruit polling and counting staff for the North Renfrewshire and Clydebank Constituency.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** Since the proposals relate to Scottish Parliament elections, the proposals should be cost neutral, but given the fact that local authorities effectively subsidise the running of all elections, it is likely that the transfer of part of the area to another Returning Officer would result in a reduction in costs borne by this authority.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** If the proposals go ahead, there are complications in the administration of the Constituency elections as the Count would almost certainly be held in Renfrewshire with the other Renfrewshire constituencies. This would mean that ballot boxes from the Clydebank area would have to be transferred to the count centre there. A detailed risk analysis would routinely be prepared by the Returning Officer for the constituency and risks would be effectively managed to protect the integrity of the ballot and the count.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1** During the review of Westminster Constituencies, this Council welcomed the creation of a single local constituency which mirrored the Council's own boundaries.
- 7.2** While it would have been desirable to have a similar outcome for the Scottish Parliament constituencies, the fixing of the quota at 54,728 is problematic. The electorate of West Dunbartonshire Council for the purposes of the Review is 67,092, substantially in excess of the quota. The necessity to adhere to the quota prevents the creation of a single West Dunbartonshire Scottish Parliament Constituency.
- 7.3** The proposed combination of Clydebank with North Renfrewshire in a single constituency is unique in Scotland in that it unites areas on both sides of a major river. It is clear that the principles detailed in paragraph 2.3 above have taken second place to ensuring numerical consistency in devising the constituencies. The two areas have limited community ties and linkages, are in separate local authority areas and share very different characteristics. The River Clyde is a physical barrier between the two areas rather than a unifying feature and should continue to serve as a natural boundary.
- 7.4** The combination of West Dunbartonshire Council wards with Argyll and Bute wards in the provisional proposals for Dumbarton and Helensburgh is less controversial insofar as the voters of Helensburgh have been part of the Dumbarton constituency since the first elections to the Scottish Parliament in 1999. While it would have been preferable for these voters to be included within an Argyll and Bute Constituency, this is also prevented by the electoral quota, the total electorate in the Argyll and Bute Council area being 68,682.

- 7.5** The controversial aspect of the proposals for the Dumbarton and Helensburgh Constituency, as far as West Dunbartonshire is concerned, comes from the inclusion of Ward 4, Kilpatrick, dividing the Clydebank area between the two proposed new constituencies.
- 7.6** As part of the consultation exercise, it is open to the Council, as well as to individual electors, to submit objections to the Commission on its proposals. Where the Commission receives representations from a local authority, or from 100 or more parliamentary electors in the affected constituency, it is required to hold a local inquiry.
- 7.7** During the Local Government Boundary Review, the Council set up a member officer working group to review the proposals issued by the Commission and to report back to Council. For the current consultation, however, this will not be possible, as the statutory deadline for representations is 14 March 2008. As a result, any decision on a response to the Commission must be taken at this meeting of Council.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1** It is recommended that the Council submits objections on the proposals for the North Renfrewshire and Clydebank Constituency, on the grounds that the creation of a constituency spanning the River Clyde and incorporating the greater part of Clydebank with North Renfrewshire is anomalous and unacceptable. It is further recommended that the Council submits representations on the proposals for the Dumbarton and Helensburgh Constituency to the effect that Clydebank should not be split between two constituencies.

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Date: 13 February 2008

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Appendix: Statutory Notice

Background Papers: Scotland Act 1998
Scottish Parliament (Constituencies) Act 2004

Letter dated 7 Feb 2008 from the Boundary Commission for Scotland to the Chief Executive (copies of the letter and relative plans are available for consultation at the Council's offices in Garshake Road, Dumbarton and Rosebery Place, Clydebank and in the main libraries in Dumbarton and Clydebank.)

Wards Affected:

All wards