

Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries Falkirk Local Inquiry

Background

1. Following the consultation on Revised Proposals for constituencies, the Commission agreed to hold a local inquiry in the Falkirk area because Falkirk Council had objected to the Revised Proposals.

Local Inquiry Venue and Chair

2. The Falkirk local inquiry was held at Falkirk Stadium on 22 August 2024, over two sessions, from 2 - 4pm and 6 - 8pm.
3. The inquiry was chaired by Sheriff Principal Gillian Wade KC, Sheriff Principal for Tayside, Central and Fife, in her capacity as Assistant Commissioner.

Attendees

4. The afternoon session was attended by more than 20 people. The evening session was attended by six people.
5. Those making submissions were: Michael Matheson MSP for Falkirk West; Euan Stainbank, MP for Falkirk; three Falkirk councillors (Cllr. Kelly (Denny and Banknock ward), Cllr Meiklejohn (Falkirk North ward), Cllr Hannah (Lower Braes ward)); Falkirk Council; and seven members of the public.

Issues raised

6. The main themes or issues raised were: opposition to the proposals as they split the closely linked communities of Banknock, Higgs and Longcroft; a desire to retain the existing constituency boundaries; and that the consultation was poorly advertised.
7. No-one at the local inquiry supported the Revised Proposals.
8. Some members of the public believed the proposals may lead to difficulty accessing local services and the proposals would amend council area boundaries. The Assistant Commissioner was tireless in her efforts to reassure those contributors that this was not the case.
9. The afternoon session lasted very close to the full two hours available.
10. At the evening session it became clear that no one wished to make a formal contribution and there was an informal discussion in which the Assistant Commissioner further reassured the public attendees that no boundaries, other than for the Scottish Parliament, would be changing following the Review. Some attendees described how they were attending in the hope of learning more about the review rather than to contribute to the inquiry.
11. At the evening session a Falkirk Council employee assisted the Assistant Commissioner and attendees by outlining the process whereby councils are alerted to reviews and summarised the efforts that are made to ensure the public are similarly informed.
12. The evening session lasted an hour.

Feedback questionnaire

13. Following the local inquiry a questionnaire was sent to attendees. A similar questionnaire had been sent to the attendees of the six previous local inquiries on the provisional proposals for constituencies.

14. Attendees were asked for their views on a number of issues relating to the inquiry and were also given the opportunity to comment on the process generally. The sliding scale questions and answers are attached at Appendix A and the comments are shown below.

Question: Is there anything else about your experience with our Local Inquiries that you would like to tell us about?

- This is my first experience of a Local Inquiry. I thought it was well run and everyone was given an opportunity to express their views. Only time will tell if those views will have a positive effect on the final boundaries. There is a general perception that the Boundary Commission does not really pay attention to different views - I hope this is not the case, given that everyone at the event on 22 August gave exactly the same message.
- I do not feel that the general public do not understand what the Boundaries Commission do. Also that the public do not receive sufficient information that it is actually happening. As a councillor I know it is difficult to contact a large number of the public. We need to raise our game and to ensure the majority have the opportunity to take part.
- This Local Inquiry was re the Revised Proposals for Scottish Parliament Boundaries. I was not aware there was a previous proposal not to change the boundaries that impact on my community - Banknock. My whole experience has been quite negative so far as I feel that there has been little effort to make some areas, impacted by suggested boundary changes, aware of what this could potentially mean to communities. This is testament to the low number of people from Banknock who turned up to give their views at the Local Inquiry session I attended. Many local people I have spoken to were completely in the dark about the proposed inclusion of Banknock in the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth to 'balance up' Scottish Parliamentary constituencies and, as a result, did not submit a written objection and had no awareness of the Local Inquiry. I do feel I was listened to at the session, however, statement read out by the Assistant Commissioner at the start, should have been shared with attendees in advance. I was also disappointed that no-one from the Scottish Boundary Commission was allowed to address questions raised.

Conclusion

15. The Commission will wish to note this summary of the Falkirk local inquiry and consider adding this to its lessons learned for the Second Review.

**Secretariat
September 2024**

Appendix A

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| Question | Before the Local Inquiry, I was satisfied with the way arrangements for the Local Inquiry were communicated (details about location, timing) - response from agree strongly to disagree strongly | Before the Local Inquiry, I understood how I would be able to participate - response range from agree strongly to disagree strongly | During the Local Inquiry, I felt I had a good opportunity to express my views - response range from agree strongly to disagree strongly | During the Local Inquiry, I felt the Assistant Commissioner listened to my views - response range from agree strongly to disagree strongly |
| Participant 1 | disagree | disagree | agree strongly | agree strongly |
| Participant 2 | disagree | agree | agree strongly | agree |
| Participant 3 | agree | agree strongly | agree strongly | neither agree nor disagree |
| Participant 4 | disagree strongly | disagree strongly | agree | agree |
| Question | Overall, I feel the Local Inquiry provided a useful opportunity to identify possible improvements to existing proposals - response range from agree strongly agree to disagree strongly | Overall, I feel I understand the different rules that Boundaries Scotland has to apply when creating electoral constituencies - response range from agree strongly to disagree strongly | Overall, I am confident that the information gathered in the Local Inquiry will be used by Boundaries Scotland to improve boundary proposals in my area - response range from agree strongly to disagree strongly | |
| Participant 1 | agree strongly | agree strongly | neither agree nor disagree | |
| Participant 2 | agree | agree | neither agree nor disagree | |
| Participant 3 | agree strongly | agree strongly | agree strongly | |
| Participant 4 | neither agree nor disagree | agree | neither agree nor disagree | |