

Holyrood poll could move Linlithgow into a Falkirk constituency

West Lothian could lose its former county town in a redraw of the constituency maps ahead of next year's Holyrood elections.

The latest proposal ties Linlithgow to a constituency with Falkirk in a the third redraw of new boundary plans.

A meeting of the council in Livingston rejected the plans and called for two Holyrood constituencies mirroring the boundaries of the Westminster ones.

Boundaries Scotland had earlier proposed lumping Whitburn and Faudhouse into a Lanarkshire constituency with Airdrie, 14 miles to the west.

A Labour motion before the council's Executive also questioned proposals to take Polbeth from a Livingston based constituency and place it with Bathgate.

The motion echoed earlier criticism of earlier redraws arguing that the Boundaries Scotland broke its own rules by linking Linlithgow to Falkirk. "Regard must be had to local authority boundaries", it said.

It added: "The proposal disregards the local identity, links and ties of the community in Linlithgow with the rest of West Lothian and the wider Lothian area for work, education, leisure, and health due to longstanding geographical,

transport, employment and community links. Linlithgow also sits within a different Health Board area, police division and Fire and Rescue Service area from the rest of the proposed Falkirk East and Linlithgow Constituency.

“There is potential for voter confusion.”

Council leader Lawrence Fitzpatrick told the meeting: “The council’s preferred solution would be to maintain the status quo with two constituencies covering West Lothian and request that consideration be given to them departing from the strict application of rules, to retain two constituencies.”

A concession from Boundaries Scotland to create two West Lothian constituencies would mean their electorates would be 73,000 and 72,000 – slightly higher than the 65,000 the commission is trying to create across the country.

Councillor Fitzpatrick told the meeting that around 70 people had attended a hearing in November to discuss the then proposals to move Whitburn and Fauldhouse into a Lanarkshire constituency.

“There was very strong objection for these villages to be moved and the local MSP in Lanarkshire also objected,” he told the meeting.

Labour’s motion added that, at the very least, Polbeth should be retained in the Almond Valley constituency even if three constituencies are created.

An amendment from the SNP group called for the same regards Polbeth but the party accepted that parts of the Linlithgow ward could move into a new Falkirk constituency.

Councillor Pauline Stafford, the deputy group leader said: “We accept your motion about Polbeth but we would abstain on Linlithgow. I think at this stage we are looking to be as pragmatic as possible and accept that changes are necessary.”

Linlithgow Councillor Tom Conn said early attempts had taken parts of urban Edinburgh and added them to West Lothian in redrawn plans.

He added: "The Boundary Commission has acted in an extraordinary manner. It is purely now a numbers game. The request to retain the town of Linlithgow within West Lothian is a sensible one because when you consider the ward of Linlithgow covers an area between the Falkirk boundary and Edinburgh boundary instead of dissecting the ward."

"I think we should ask the Boundary Commission to do a final revision because clearly time is of the essence."

Councillor Stafford said: "This is the third iteration. We all appreciate the challenging job that Boundaries Scotland have got in rebalancing constituencies across Scotland and this is a Scotland wide review. Scotland is one of the least locally governed countries in the world so to ask them to change the quotas to this size would undermine the sense of local democracy even further in Scotland, so at this stage we would like to be pragmatic.

"While we would of course like to keep Linlithgow I think that is our third go at this . We knew we would be one of the most affected areas so at this point we are looking to maintain as much community cohesion and sense of place as possible but we do accept that changes are going to be necessary."

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter