

Holyrood constituencies change takes Linlithgow from West Lothian

A 'bizarre' change to the electoral boundaries which would see the historic county town of Linlithgow removed from West Lothian is facing opposition from angry local politicians.

Boundaries Scotland has recommended welding the town into a new Falkirk East and Linlithgow constituency for the upcoming Holyrood elections – similar to the former Westminster constituency.

The proposed move was branded a “bizarre numbers game” by one veteran councillor, while another warned it would confuse people and put them off voting.

If agreed by MSPs the plan will split West Lothian into three constituencies for the 2026 Holyrood election for the first time since the foundation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.

West Lothian's SNP MSPs have been urged not to support the boundary changes when the proposals come before them this month.

Other options, including one moving Whitburn and Fauldhouse into a constituency centred on Airdrie 14 miles to the west, have already been rejected after public consultation.

At a meeting of West Lothian Council's Executive, anger was expressed that no public meeting had been held in Linlithgow to debate the proposals.

Councillor Sally Pattle told the meeting: "Let's not forget it is Linlithgowshire. I just don't feel, and people I represent don't feel as if we have had our chance to put our case forward. We're just so disappointed that our history, our feelings and normal allegiances haven't been taken into account.

"It has been a very frustrating and lengthy process. I am slightly concerned it is [not only] going to confuse people but also turn a lot of people off in next year's Holyrood elections because they are not going to feel as if they really understand where they are voting for in Linlithgow.

Labour's Tom Conn said he was "extremely disappointed at a bizarre numbers game".

Councillor Conn said it was "ironic that the decision had been made as the town prepared for its historic Marches."

"I just want to record my extreme disappointment at the Boundary Commission's failure to take into account Linlithgow's particular circumstances and historical associations," he said.

"It was the county town of Linlithgowshire [West Lothian's original name]. *

He added: "It will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament, and I would certainly hope that our local parliamentary representatives in West Lothian will take that into account."

The SNP's Pauline Orr said: "I can appreciate how disappointing this change of boundaries is, it is never easy. What I can say is there have been multiple conversations,

meetings and discussion opportunities to put down concerns in writing locally.”

Council leader Lawrence Fitzpatrick told the meeting that he had attended a very busy hearing to discuss the Whitburn proposal and added: “I did find it surprising that a hearing was not held in Linlithgow. They should have held a hearing in Linlithgow. I’m sure it would have been well attended.”

Boundaries Scotland said that after a meeting in Falkirk to discuss the proposal “the Commission agreed that a further local inquiry was not justified.” Also time constraints around the publication of the latest review by 1 May prevented the chance of another public meeting, the commissioners said.

Publication of the plans produced mixed responses on social media. Dechmont Community, writing on the West Lothian Council website said: “Costing more MONEY.”

Another said: “Falkirk’s not West Lothian! And another: “There should be less not more”

Others pointed to the geographic rather than political boundaries: “How can South Alloa, Slammanan, Polmont, etc be classed as West Lothian.

“Bo’ness was part of West Lothian until 1976. The great boundary change. Central Region Council. Ahh the days.”

West Lothian will split between three Scottish Parliamentary constituencies, which are:

- Almond Valley constituency
- Bathgate constituency
- Falkirk East and Linlithgow constituency

Both West Lothian and Falkirk councils objected to the plans for a joint constituency, for similar reasons.

West Lothian Council said the proposed Falkirk East and Linlithgow constituency broke with historical, employment, educational, leisure, health, geographical, transport and community ties. West Lothian called for two constituencies to cover the council area.

That alternative would result in constituencies with just over 73,000 voters in each. Boundaries Scotland is trying to achieve constituencies of around 65,000.

Boundaries Scotland said that would put the two proposed West Lothian too far above the electoral quota recommended for each constituency.

The council also objected to West Lothian being moved away from its neighbouring Lothians constituencies into a new Central Scotland and Lothians West region. The new regions are again determined by changing populations and each has around 500,000 voters.

On the publication of the latest review Prof Ailsa Henderson, Chair of Boundaries Scotland, said: "Our review commenced on 1 September 2022 and sought to address significant population movement within Scotland, including areas of substantial growth.

"We have held five rounds of consultation on constituencies, three rounds on regions and local inquiries where we have engaged with the public across Scotland.

"We have responded to the very helpful suggestions we received, amongst the nearly 5,000 submissions, by making changes to boundaries and names."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter