

MARGARET SMITH MSP

Ref: MS/BC/AT

9th August 2006

Tom McCabe MSP
Minister for Finance and Public Services
St Andrews House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Dear Tom

Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland

Fourth Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements

City of Edinburgh Council Area

Representation on Report to Scottish Ministers E06012 July 2006

I am writing to you on behalf of myself and my Westminster colleague John Barrett MP, to express our deep concern and anger at the manner in which this review has been conducted and the impact it will have on the ward boundaries affecting Davidson's Mains and Silverknowes in our Edinburgh West constituency.

The LGB Commission have now made their Final Recommendation to you in the above Report. In that Report the Commission have recommended no change to their provisional proposals for new ward boundaries in the north-west of the City and in particular for the community centred on Davidson's Mains. They have made this recommendation despite massive community dissatisfaction. Their proposal is to split this community across three wards. We feel strongly that the Commission have failed in their duty to protect this community and its local ties under Schedule 6 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 as amended by The Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004.

I will not go into the myriad reasons why this is a ludicrous suggestion. However, the proposed boundaries separate Davidson's Mains village, Silverknowes estate and the Corbiehill/House O'Hill areas into 3 different wards; respectively Almond (1), Forth (4) and Inverleith (5) when in fact these areas are and have been for many years **one** community. It means that what is at present a coherent community will be split in three. People in all three of these areas attend the same local schools, playgroup and nursery, Health Centre, churches and local amenities. I enclose my previous correspondence with the Commission on this issue.

I would point out that splitting the area in this way will mean that up to eleven councillors would be eligible to get involved in local issues and attend meetings of organisations such as the Davidson's Mains Primary School Board.

While I appreciate that there may well be knock-on impacts if there is further delay I would urge you to look again at this aspect of the Commission's report. We believe

the communities we represent have been doubly let down by the system. Firstly, the Commission has chosen to ignore the representations made to it on this issue by 588 local residents, a large number of community and party political organisations and myself, John Barrett MP, and Councillor Jim Lowrie, as the elected representatives for the area. Objections to this part of the Report represented 94% of the objections made in the City of Edinburgh.

Secondly, we are also very concerned that the Boundary Commission has taken 48 weeks, rather than the maximum 20 weeks suggested under the Act, to consider these boundaries and come to a decision. This has meant that the Commission have now said they are unable to make any changes because of the knock-on impact on other wards. I believe that had they addressed this contentious suggestion as a matter of urgency rather than leaving it till the end of the Review they might have been able to look properly at other proposals.

I believe there is a way in which Silverknowes could be moved from Ward 4 to Ward 1 and electors in the Corbiehill/House O'Hill area could be moved from Ward 5 to Ward 1 with the resultant new Wards 1, 4 and 5 having no significantly worse electoral parity than some of the Commission's other proposals in the City. **In any event the Commission's Report (Part 1 Para 3) itself confirms that in any conflict between electoral parity and breaking local ties greater weight should be given to the latter as per Schedule 6 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 as amended by The Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004.**

I appreciate that the Boundary Commission is an independent body. This is particularly important so that there can be no question of 'gerrymandering' for party political gain or purpose. However, I do hope that on this occasion, instead of accepting the fait accompli you have received from the Commission you will ask them to look again at this matter as matter of urgency.

We therefore very strongly request that Scottish Ministers do not approve an Electoral Arrangements Order for the City of Edinburgh Council Area based on the above Report; and that the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's recommendations for the Davidson's Mains area of the City are reviewed and revised.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Smith MSP
Edinburgh West

And on behalf of John Barrett MP

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Copies:- Boundary Commission
Davidson's Mains & Silverknowes Association
Councillor James Lowrie