

Liberton & District Community Council

8th October 2015

Local Government Boundary Commission For Scotland
Thistle House
91 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh, EH12 5HD

Dear Sirs

FIFTH REVIEWS OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL - WARD 16 LIBERTON/GILMERTON

Liberton and District Community Council welcomes your consultation and wishes to lodge a strong objection to the initial proposal for Ward 16 Liberton/Gilmerton.

Preamble

Liberton has a long history as it has developed over centuries from a rural community to a thriving and varied residential suburb of Edinburgh. From at least the 12th century Liberton Kirk, in what is now the Kirkgate, has been at the centre of the community and of a large civil parish hinterland. The current Liberton Kirk building remains a prominent landmark at the heart of the area as it celebrates the bicentenary of the laying of its foundations in January 1815. At that time, the area was still rural but, particularly through the 20th century, there has been a mix of major council and private housing development in areas such as Gracemount, Gilmerton, Inch, Moredun, Alnwickhill and Mortonhall, all of which identify closely with the greater Liberton area. All of these areas, and more, are served by two Community Councils, Liberton and District and Gilmerton/Inch, and the whole area currently forms the cohesive local electoral area of Liberton/Gilmerton with a good mix of housing tenure and communality of interest. That Liberton is more than an arbitrary selection of owner-occupied houses is fittingly recorded in "LIBERTON in Ancient and Modern Times", by George Good, Edinburgh, 1893 which has been republished twice in recent years.

Summary

In summary, what is proposed in the Fifth Review significantly disturbs that cohesiveness; looks geographically immature; removes a large part of the heart of Liberton; and allocates that heart to an area, Southside/Newington (Ward 15) with which it has no communality. We now wish to expand on this summary by addressing the criteria set out in paragraph 2.1 of your Fifth Reviews of Electoral Arrangements Guidance Booklet, a booklet which we have very carefully considered.

Local Government Boundary Commission Criteria

(a) Overall aim of acting in the interests of effective and convenient local government

Local government in Edinburgh is not delivered on a ward by ward basis but rather by many centrally based services and by Neighbourhood Partnerships which mostly cover groupings of wards. The proposed change to Ward 16 will, in our view, make little or no positive difference to the effectiveness and convenience of the **delivery** of local government services. **However, we consider that the proposal will have an adverse impact on the effectiveness and convenience of the administration of local government**, particularly in the way in which local councillors will have to relate to the divided and disparate areas proposed.

(b) The number of electors per councillor in each ward shall be, as nearly as may be, the same

Here we refer to LGBCS Paper 2265 which is available for consultation only on the Web. We understand the logic and desirability of seeking to equalise, as far as is possible, the workload of councillors, and can see that the number of electors per councillor is a reasonable proxy in that context. However, factors other than elector numbers have a bearing on overall councillor workload and we consider that numbers alone should not override the logic of cohesive and credible community boundaries for electoral purposes.

Looking at Options B and C, specifically in relation to Liberton/Gilmerton and Southside/Newington, we contend that there is nothing to be gained in electoral terms by the disruption arising from the redrawing of the ward boundary. Under Option B (the option the Commission proposes)

Liberton/Gilmerton has a forecast electorate of 23,099 and a forecast disparity of -0.2%, while the figures for Southside/Newington are 24,787 and 7.1%. Under Option C the Liberton/Gilmerton figures are 25,025 and 8.2%, and for Southside/Newington 23,292 and 0.7%. The overall effect is neutral in that Southside/Newington has the larger disparity under Option B, but Liberton/Gilmerton has the larger, and similar, disparity under Option C. We recognise that deprivation is significant in the latter ward but consider that the disruption inherent in Option B far outweighs this.

(c) Subject to this, we shall have regard to: local ties that would be broken by fixing a particular boundary; and the desirability of fixing boundaries that are easily identifiable, with the first of these taking precedence over the second

Our contention is that, **in particular, local ties would be broken by fixing the boundary in the way proposed**, but we also take the view that the boundary proposed is not easily identifiable.

In relation to **local ties**, we realise that the same people will continue to live in the same houses in the same roads, with the same local landmarks and the same public services. They will still be able to see their friends and neighbours. But ties will be broken in the sense that the established heart of Liberton will be cut out and transplanted into Southside/Newington for electoral purposes. The proposed new boundary essentially disconnects the long established private housing areas to the west of Kirk Brae, including Liberton Brae and the roads off it on both sides and Liberton Drive. Liberton Kirk, which we have explained at

the beginning of this representation is at the centre of Liberton both physically and spiritually, will be transplanted, as will Liberton High School, despite the fact that a large part of its catchment area, and Liberton Primary School, will remain in the proposed new Gilmerton Ward.

We appreciate that redrawing any boundary is likely to lead to some degree of dissatisfaction, especially at the margins. But this proposed redrawing does not just affect the margins. It extracts a central area to a ward with which it has no communality at all, other than the use of the arterial route of Craigmillar Park and Minto Street to the City Centre.

8 councillors, rather than 4, would now have to interact with us as the Community Council. Those 8 Councillors, rather than 4, would also have to interact with Liberton High School. There will be issues to do with, for example, the delivery of services or with planning proposals common to parts of both the area to be excised and the area to remain in what was Liberton/Gilmerton. Once again this may give rise to complications and duplication in councillor involvement. There will be other examples of this sort of unnecessary duplication and complication, such as the location of doctors' surgeries. It is in that context that we have suggested earlier that the proposal is not in the interests of effective and convenient local government. In short, what seems likely is a reduction in effectiveness and an increase in elected member workload arising solely from the proposed boundary change.

The proposed change also seems likely to disrupt a well established polling place structure. For example, Liberton Kirk and Liberton Northfield Church (on Gilmerton Road) would both be removed to the Southside/Newington ward, whilst some areas for which those have hitherto been convenient polling stations would be in the new Gilmerton ward.

We also have concerns as to whether **the boundary is easily identifiable**. It tends to meander in and out of streets and areas. Some local people with whom we have consulted have pointed to the fact that the boundary seems to divide, rather clinically, areas of private housing from what would previously have been described as Council housing. This has given rise to the suggestion of gerrymandering. The Community Council recognises that this is not the intention. But it should be a matter of concern to the Commission that this suggestion has even been made.

(d) We may depart from the strict application of electoral parity to reflect special geographical considerations

We have no particular points to make in relation to this criterion as described in paragraphs 5.24 and 5.25 of your general guidance booklet. We would, however, reiterate that the proposed new boundary is rather aberrant and perverse in community and geographical terms. This criterion is also of interest in that it confirms that there is scope for the Commission to depart from the strict application of electoral parity and apply a degree of flexibility.

Consideration

The Fifth Review provides for 5 more Councillors for Edinburgh, and we recognise that this has consequences for ward boundaries across a wide area of the city. Your Edinburgh consultation document, at the 5th bullet point in paragraph 7, refers to that as well as the concept of aligning boundaries to “natural communities”, described as a local geography used by the City of Edinburgh Council. We also recognise that you wish to improve overall forecast parity.

We have been unable to pin down anything which fully explains Edinburgh’s “Natural Communities”, although we have found material on their Natural Neighbourhoods. We do not believe that the proposed alteration to the Ward 16 boundary has anything to do with those Neighbourhoods.

The simple fact is that there is absolutely no natural community or natural neighbourhood link between any part of Liberton and Southside/Newington, except possibly at the northern periphery of the existing Ward 16 area. **In our view, therefore, the concept of “Natural Communities” is of no relevance to the Ward 16 change as proposed and provides no basis on which to justify altering the boundary in the way suggested. Indeed, if the intention was that the new ward boundary should follow the Natural Neighbourhood boundary, this has not been achieved; nor do we consider it desirable to do so.** Liberton “Neighbourhood”, as shown on the Council’s Natural Neighbourhood maps, includes the Carnbee, Malbet Park and Yewlands estates as well as Liberton Hospital and an area around Ellen’s Glen. It also contains residential streets south of Kirkgate, down to and including Little Road. These established parts of Liberton would be left in Gilmerton. Other established residential streets south and west of Kirk Brae are also included in the Council’s Natural Neighbourhood of Liberton but are proposed for removal to the Southside/Newington ward.

It is particularly interesting to note that the Commission may itself have had some doubt about the appropriateness of the boundary in the Liberton area, and, in that regard, we draw your attention to the last sentence of paragraph 49 of LGBCS Paper 2265 which records that “Option B employs weaker bounding features in the Liberton area of the city than the other options.”

On the question of improving parity, as indicated above, the interaction between Liberton/Gilmerton and Southside/Newington is for all practical purposes neutral, with one area securing a more favourable degree of parity under Option B and the other area being in that situation under Option C.

All members of the Community Council find it very difficult to understand how this proposal can have been put forward, and are particularly disappointed that

the City of Edinburgh Council has apparently supported it and even suggested the deletion of Liberton from the title if the ward boundary is amended, despite the fact that, even if Option B prevails, the new Ward 16 will still include a significant part of Liberton. Other members of the public in the area with whom we have discussed the issue are simply incredulous at the proposal, and many have used undiplomatic terms such as “crazy” and “barking mad.”

Our position

We recognise that the redrawing of boundaries can be a complex and delicate matter, but we object strongly to what is proposed regarding Ward 16.

We note that, at its meeting on 3 January 2015, the Commission saw Option B (based on the Council’s “Natural Communities”) and Option C (informed chiefly by Community Council boundaries) as similar in important respects, but preferred Option B in regards to deprivation. **Unfortunately, Option B does not provide a credible outcome for Ward 16.**

We cannot know what the reaction to proposed changes is across the City. It may be that they are generally unobjectionable for other wards and that the question of a wider review of the initial proposals does not arise. In that event, we urge the Commission to exercise a degree of flexibility, recognising the “weaker bounding features in the Liberton area” to which it has already pointed. **We believe that the most straightforward way in which to resolve the difficulty is, in effect, to apply Option C to Ward 16 and Ward 15 (insofar as the proposed movement between those two wards is involved) so that the boundaries are informed by the Community Council boundaries.** We believe that this could be done as a discrete adjustment in this area on the periphery of the City without need for consequential adjustment to wards other than 15 and 16.

In conclusion, we ask you to carefully consider this submission which we have made on as objective a basis as possible. We would be very happy to engage in discussion with you if you consider that necessary and appropriate.

We look forward to a positive outcome.

Yours faithfully

James J Henry

Signed

**James J Henry
(Chairperson)**

