

Third Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements

Aberdeenshire Council Area

Report to the Secretary of State for Scotland

Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland

Report Number E98030
October 1998

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Introduction

1. The Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 determined that on and after 1 April 1996, Scotland should be divided into local government areas as named and described in Schedule 1 to the Act and that, for each area, there should be a council consisting of a convener and councillors. It further determined that each council should have all the functions exercised immediately before 1 April in relation to their area by any existing regional, islands or district council.

2. On 1 April 1996 all local government areas existing immediately before that date which were regions and districts and all regional and district councils ceased to exist.

3. Schedule 2 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 also established that every local government area (other than areas of the old islands councils) should be divided into such electoral wards as may be specified in a direction made by the Secretary of State after carrying out such consultations as he considered appropriate. Those wards were to apply for the purpose of any election of councillors held before 'the relevant year of election' (defined as meaning the first year of ordinary election of councillors for the area in question occurring after the making of an order constituting the new electoral wards of that local government area in consequence of the review currently being undertaken by the Commission). In accordance with procedures that applied prior to the reorganisation in 1975, the views of councils were invited. Thereafter, the Secretary of State determined that, for the purpose of any election of councillors before the relevant year of election, 47 electoral wards were appropriate for Aberdeenshire local government area. Additionally, the proposed wards should be as described in the report of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland to the Secretary of State for Scotland on its second statutory review of electoral arrangements for Banff and Buchan District dated 14 March 1994 (18 wards), Gordon District dated 3 March 1994 - (16 wards), and Kincardine and Deeside District dated 22 July 1994 - (13 wards).

Origin and Commencement of the Review

4. The Commission has a statutory duty under section 14 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to undertake periodic reviews of local authority electoral arrangements. The Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 amended section 20 and schedule 5 of the 1973 Act, directing that:

as soon as practicable after 1 April 1996, the Boundary Commission shall-

review the electoral arrangements for all local government areas for the purpose of considering the future electoral arrangements for those areas; and

formulate proposals for those arrangements.

5. This, therefore, is one of the statutory reviews required in terms of section 16(2) and Schedule 5 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended.

6. On 22 March 1996, the Scottish Office Development Department gave local authorities advance notice of the intention of the Commission to carry out a third statutory review of electoral arrangements. On 29 March 1996, we wrote to all councils to announce the commencement of the third statutory review of electoral arrangements and to explain the procedures to be followed. We also gave notice of the commencement of the review to all Community Councils, Electoral Registration Officers, Members of Parliament with a constituency interest and the Scottish headquarters of the political parties. In addition, public notice of the commencement of the review, which included an invitation to interested parties to apply to us for a copy of our consultation letter to councils, was given in newspapers.

Background

7. During the passage through Parliament of the 1994 Act, there was cross-Party understanding that we would review the number of councillors and boundaries of electoral wards for each council in time for changes to be implemented for the 1999 local elections. This was seen to be important because at the time of reorganisation, as mentioned above, the Secretary of State defined the electoral wards for the new councils and to a great extent based these on existing district wards. It was, however, recognised that using the existing district wards led to some councils being significantly over-represented in relation to other areas. Further, it also led to councillors within the same local authority areas representing wards with significantly different numbers of electors. Accordingly, our review was seen as important to ensure equity in representation across and within all local authorities. Further, the new authorities were now responsible for the provision of the full range of all services and, accordingly, consideration had to be given to determining an appropriate number of councillors for service provision to be effectively managed.

8. This review is, therefore, the first conducted by us which sets out to determine the appropriate number of councillors required for councils to operate efficiently and to establish the boundaries of electoral wards. To achieve both objectives our review was conducted in 2 main stages:

identification of a suitable methodology for determining numbers of councillors which, applied across all local authority areas, would be seen to be equitable and consistent; and

the division of each local authority area into the appropriate number of electoral wards in accordance with the statutory rules.

9. A copy of the statutory rules to be employed by us and the Secretary of State in considering proposals for electoral arrangements is provided at Appendix A.

Number of Councillors

10. In formulating proposals for the number of councillors we have been guided by two main principles:

effective management of councils; and

equity amongst electors.

11. We recognised that the number of councillors is crucial because there is, undoubtedly, some number below which it would be impossible for a council to discharge its duty to deliver services to its population and, conversely, there is also some number above which a council becomes unwieldy and cumbersome. We were influenced in this respect by the prior considerations of two other bodies.

12. The Royal Commission on Local Government In Scotland 1966-69, under the Chairmanship of the Rt. Hon. Lord Wheatley, provided a basis by which the number of regional councillors and the size of constituency to be represented might be determined by taking into account the fact that population density varies widely in Scotland as a whole and within regions. The then accepted view was that council size should not generally exceed 75 members. In England and Wales the Redcliffe-Maude Commission, which reported to Parliament in 1969, also drew attention to the management problems of large councils and endorsed the recommendation of The Committee on the Management of Local Government that a maximum number of 75 councillors should be set.

13. After careful consideration we concluded that, in the Scottish context and to provide additional flexibility, an upper limit of 80 councillors should be set. We also concluded that a minimum number of councillors should be set, recognising that even the smallest local government areas are now responsible for a wide range of functions. Accordingly, we decided that the minimum number of councillors should be 18. Further, these limits should apply to all councils.

14. Regarding equity as between voters, we considered that ideally each elector's vote should possess the same weight and significance in local government elections throughout the country; furthermore, ideally, there should be similar mutual accessibility between electors and councillors. However, since Scotland is a country of great diversity, both geographically and

demographically, a fact reflected in the areas for which councils created by the Act of 1994 are responsible, and since we are satisfied that, in the interests of good local government, the number of councillors in any council must fall within certain limits, we concluded that these ideals are unattainable in practice. In this situation, recognising that a fair degree of homogeneity exists within certain groups of councils, which exhibit broadly similar geographic and demographic characteristics, we resolved to strive for equity in the senses mentioned within these groups, so far as that is possible within the constraints of the legislation under which we operate.

15. We, therefore, proposed a methodology which initially categorised council areas by density and distribution of population using data available from the 1991 Census of Population. Having classified council areas according to these criteria and adjusted the ratio of electors to each councillor to take account of similar characteristics, we have been able to achieve a broad equity of electorate across and within all council areas.

16. In our letter of 29 March 1996, all councils were informed of the proposed methodology and future pattern of representation for their council area. Councils were requested to make any representations they wished on numbers of councillors by 29 April 1996 so that a meeting could be arranged with the Deputy Chairman and Secretary to discuss the pattern of representation and any matters regarding our review that the Council wished to raise. Following visits to all councils by the Deputy Chairman and Secretary to discuss the proposed methodology and to consider alternatives which could be applied across Scotland, no alternative methodologies were offered but a number of councils suggested that the underlying classification should be amended to include an additional category.

17. At our meeting of 17 June 1996, we re-examined the criteria to be used to categorise mainland councils with similar characteristics in light of the representations made by a number of councils. We concluded that there should be 6 rather than 5 categories. The final categorisation of similar mainland councils was then agreed as follows:

- Category 1 Large Cities Glasgow and Edinburgh.
- Category 2 Cities Aberdeen and Dundee.
- Category 3 Authorities with less than 60% of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons **AND** an overall population density of one person or more per hectare.
- Category 4 Authorities with **EITHER** 60% or more of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons **OR** an overall population density of less than one person per hectare.
- Category 5 Authorities with 60% or more of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons **AND** an overall population density of less than one person per hectare.

- Category 6 Authorities with 60% or more of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons **AND** an overall population density of less than 0.2 persons per hectare.

18. In addition to the 6 categories we then determined the ratio of councillors to electorate for mainland councils that would allow for efficient management and appropriate representation, as set out in paragraphs 11 - 14 above, and considered that the following would be appropriate:

- Category 1 1:6,000
- Category 2 1:4,000
- Category 3 1:3,500
- Category 4 1:3,000
- Category 5 1:2,500
- Category 6 1:2,000

19. On 20 June 1996 we wrote to all mainland councils informing them of the revised criteria for determining councilor numbers and inviting them to prepare a draft scheme of electoral arrangements for their Council area. Following upon that, Aberdeen City Council brought a petition for Judicial Review of the decision taken by us at our meeting of 17 June, 1996 in the Court of Session. In it they sought a decree of declarator that that decision in relation to them was unlawful, ultra vires and null and void; they also sought a decree of reduction of the decision in relation to them and certain ancillary remedies. We resisted this petition, which was dismissed by the Court on 20 December 1996 after a hearing.

20. We considered the ratio of councillors to electors for the 3 islands councils at our meeting of 26 August 1996 and concluded that the appropriate ratio would be 1:750. On 28 August 1996 we wrote to these councils informing them of our decision.

Aberdeenshire Council's Proposals

21. Aberdeenshire Council submitted a scheme of electoral arrangements for 68 wards on 3 December 1996. The Council had conducted a public consultation exercise during the summer by press advertisement and direct contact with Community Councils. In determining ward sizes, the Council believed that the informal guidelines did not suit Aberdeenshire and it agreed that its proposals would breach the guideline in order to avoid splitting communities.

22. The Council, whilst completing a draft scheme for 68 wards, continued to oppose the review. It believed that the Commission's proposal for 68 wards was unnecessary and unwelcome. Further, it would lead to considerable disruption and confusion in the minds of the electorate and also to additional expenditure. Financial resources would be better spent on services to the community which were already under severe financial restraint. The Council asked that the Commission limit the third statutory review to the minimum change necessary to meet the needs of the community and, in any event, delay any general review, if such a review

was deemed necessary, for a period of three years. The Council considered that its objections to the review were a matter of substance and asked that a public hearing be held into the proposals at an appropriate time.

23. The Council advertised its scheme in local newspapers and displayed copies of its report and maps at Council offices throughout its area. Community Councils were informed of the arrangements. Interested parties were asked to make comments to the Council and Commission by 31 January 1997.

24. The Council wrote on 14 May 1997 to say that, in light of the Government's stated intention to review the operation of Local Government in Scotland, it seemed premature to effect an alteration in councillor numbers. There was no support in Aberdeenshire for the proposed move to 68 councillors. The Council had also had the benefit of working the new system for a full year. There had been no call for an increased councillor representation and this practical consideration should be taken into account.

25. Twenty-nine representations were received.

26. Aberdour and Tyrie Community Council wrote to say that in view of the poor response at the most recent local elections it felt that the present structure and number of councillors was sufficient.

27. Banff and Buchan Constituency Labour Party opposed the proposed changes which it considered had been carried out on a numbers basis, did not take local communities into consideration and such an approach was not conducive to good representative government.

28. Meldrum and Bourtie Community Council considered that the proposed changes were illogical, irrelevant and untimely. It believed that no account had been taken of future growth in its area. The proposals were entirely arbitrary, would only be temporary and would be costly.

29. Turriff and District Community Council stated that irritation had been expressed locally at the prospect of having to undergo change so soon after Local Government reorganisation. It believed that the thinking behind the review should have been considered before the new Council was set up. It objected to Turriff being split between three wards. If parity had to be applied it should be considered more sensitively. Turriff should have two councilors with the third representing the adjoining rural area.

30. Fyvie - Rothie - Monquitter Community Council expressed concern at the increase in the number of councilors which it believed would considerably affect its area.

31. Keep Grampian Beautiful Campaign wrote to suggest that the former County of Banffshire should be recreated and if necessary linked with Morayshire to make the latter more viable as a Council area.

32. A letter was received which stated that review should be delayed until the Scottish Parliament was established which would allow the present system of Council administration, ward boundaries etc. to be reviewed in light of new situation.

33. A letter was received which stated that the proposals would mean Huntly being divided into two wards. Whilst it was appreciated that larger towns in other Council areas were better managed in this way, the proposals for Huntly would probably result in two councillors from different political parties which would do nothing to harmonise decisions made for Huntly as a whole. It was also stated that the new Council appeared to be 'strapped for cash' and increasing the number of councillors and all that went with it could only exacerbate the situation.

34. Banff and Macduff Community Council considered that the Commission had overlooked an important aspect in its attempt to standardise wards in Aberdeenshire. Communities with common interests had been ruthlessly divided. Under past arrangements, part of Macduff, a fishing area, was linked to Aberchirder, a farming area, but this had recently been resolved. The present review had once again cut off part of Macduff. In Banff, the present ward was to be divided in a piecemeal fashion. The outcome of the changes could lead to disenfranchisement of the people. Boundaries should be kept intact, regardless of numbers.

35. Strathbogie Community Council wrote to voice its opposition to the proposed increase in the number of councillors. It believed that reorganisation would simply add to the confusion felt by the local electorate and, at a time when Councils were facing an appalling lack of finance, it was a waste of money. Aberdeenshire Council with 68 councillors would be too large to be workable and too large to be able to meet in its entirety because there was no venue large enough. Locally, the formation of two wards at Huntly was forcing a marriage of two areas which were of a very different nature and, in such circumstances, the rural element of the partnership would lose out to the urban area.

36. Mintlaw and District Community Council wrote to express dismay at the proposal for 68 councillors. It believed that the present arrangements should be allowed sufficient time to settle in before any unnecessary changes were imposed. The question of finance had also to be addressed because the increase in numbers would not result in a proportional increase in government funding at a time when its own administration grant had been reduced to zero.

37. Inverurie Community Council wrote to say that the proposed changes were not appropriate for Inverurie and to endorse the comments from the Garioch Area Committee which were submitted to the Electoral Registration Officer on 12 September 1996.

38. Westhill and District Residents Association wrote to say that it was totally opposed to the dramatic increase in the number of councillors. The timing was inappropriate so soon after the introduction of the new unitary authority and at a time of severe financial restraint. The proposals would place an even more intolerable burden on Council Tax payers. Westhill has had two councillors for some time and with the increase to around 10,000 population it seemed reasonable to retain two councillors for the area. It appreciated that 5,000 electors was a larger number than the guidelines for rural areas suggested but wished to point out that such numbers

are acceptable in city areas. Councillors in Westhill could easily cope with these numbers and Westhill, with its high-density population/housing, should be considered in this light.

39. Belhelvie Community Council wrote to say that there should be no change to the existing boundaries so soon after the formation of the new Council.

40. A letter was received which stated that there was no need to increase the number of councillors so soon after local government reorganisation. It was realised that this was necessary to bring local government closer to the people but it queried whether or not the people actually wanted this, or were willing to pay for it. It asked where people of the right calibre could be found and thought that the end result would be poorer quality councillors. Local Government reorganisation was designed to reduce costs but increasing the number of councillors was reversing the process. Further, there would be duplication of effort which would also add to the costs and likely confusion. Some Community Councils would be attended by three councillors which, in some cases, would mean more councillors than Community representatives. The proposals were a recipe for disaster.

41. Fraserburgh Community Council indicated that it was totally opposed to the proposals which were happening at a time of great financial restraint. The changes should not be implemented without the essential funding to cover the extra expense of 21 more councillors.

42. Donside Community Council remained of the view that the exercise was not required by the public at large. With the almost daily reference to lack of funds for essential services, the costs of additional members was an unnecessary expense. The Community Council was concerned that the review only considered numbers and gave no attention to geographic and tribal concerns. The new wards were now afforded the dignity of proposed names illustrating the extent of the newly generated problems. The existing Community Council served broadly as the catchment area for Alford Academy with a single Councillor for Ward 21. It was difficult to envisage a Community Council attracting three councillors to its meetings. The Community Council had existed broadly in its present form since its creation and its replacement with three diversified Community Councils would not do. It would also not do to state that Community Councils need not change as this statement ignored the integrated nature of local communities. Moving Aberdeenshire from category 5 to category 4 in the Commission's classification would obviate the need for additional seats in Aberdeenshire. Seats could then be reconsidered on the basis of population change alone. In the event of additional seats being forced upon the Council, the Commission should instruct the Council and ERO to pay heed to the geographic and tribal boundaries and acknowledged loyalties within the Community Council structure.

43. Donside Community Council further wrote to say that it seemed unlikely there would be a meeting of minds on the question of the number of councillors for Aberdeenshire. A local hearing was requested so that interested parties had the opportunity for better presentation of evidence.

44. Torphins Community Council wished to place on record its strong opposition to the proposed changes. The Council Tax payer would be picking up the bill for boundary changes it

did not want or need. The Council did not want the changes. Why, therefore, should they go ahead when nobody thought they were necessary?

45. Malcolm Bruce MP wrote to say that he had received a number of representations regarding the proposals to alter boundaries and increase the number of councillors in Aberdeenshire. Mr Bruce believed that, if it was possible to define Aberdeenshire in category 4 of the Commission's classification, then many of the problems would be resolved. He noted that the Council sought to ensure that the new boundaries were rigidly contained within its existing area committees on the grounds that these areas had only recently been established and must not be altered. He noted that no account had been taken of Parliamentary boundaries and councillors could be representing wards which straddled constituencies. Re-designating Aberdeenshire into category 4 would be widely welcomed.

46. Councillor Smith wrote to say that the proposed increase in numbers of councillors was too large and that the revised boundaries did not take into account traditional community ties, particularly in the Donside area. The proposals should be subject of a public inquiry, which would allow all interested parties to put their case and convince the Commission of the local opposition to the increase in wards and proposed boundaries.

47. Six letters were received which stated that the correspondents wished to object to the increase in representation in Aberdeenshire Council area.

48. Turriff and District Community Council wrote to say that it was concerned at the proposed increase in councillors and that it had written to Malcolm Chisholm MP to ask if Aberdeenshire could be included in category 4 rather than category 5 of the Commission's classification.

49. We noted the position of the Council and others regarding the number of councillors. As we mention earlier in our report, this was very carefully considered at an early stage in the review process. Councils had been consulted and, as a consequence, the classification of Council areas had been amended to introduce an additional category. No Council had offered a different methodology for classifying Councils across Scotland. We noted that Aberdeenshire had, at the 1991 Census, the highest percentage of population living outwith settlements of 10,000+ and the sixth lowest number of persons per hectare. Aberdeenshire Council clearly fell within category 5 of the Commission's classification. The majority of Councils had accepted the Commission's revised methodology and we concluded, therefore, that it would be inappropriate to reconsider the classification of Councils. We also considered that a public enquiry would not be an appropriate forum at which representations regarding the number of councillors could be considered.

50. We noted the Government's proposals to review aspects of Local Government in Scotland but concluded that the Commission had been directed by Parliament to conduct a review of electoral arrangements for every local authority area. In the absence of legislation altering that direction, the Commission was obliged to fulfil the statutory directive set out in the Local Government, etc. (Scotland) Act 1994.

51. We noted representations regarding the financial implications of a Council of 68 Members but concluded that we were concerned with considering the revision of electoral arrangements across the whole of Scotland. We further concluded that consideration of Local Government finance was for The Scottish Office and the Council, not for the Commission.

52. We noted representations which expressed concern about the changing relationship between electoral ward boundaries, Community Councils, Parliamentary Constituencies and the boundaries of other areas. We concluded that, in considering electoral arrangements, the Commission could not be constrained by boundaries which were determined for other purposes and were not subject to the statutory rules concerning local authority electoral arrangements. The determination of Community Council areas was a matter for Councils, in consultation with local communities. Similarly, the Boundary Commission for Scotland fixed Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries and we were aware that a review of these arrangements was planned for the near future.

53. We noted this review was not concerned with consideration of changes to the administrative boundaries of Council areas.

54. We examined the Council's draft scheme and noted that, in a considerable number of wards there were divergences from electoral parity which we did not consider appropriate. We, therefore, instructed our Secretariat to prepare, where it was possible and practicable to do so, alternative proposals for these wards. In considering the revised proposals prepared by our Secretariat, using data provided by the Council, we noted a significant improvement across the Council area and further noted that the boundaries of 50 wards had been revised.

Publication of Commission's Provisional Proposals

55. Public notice was given of the publication of our provisional proposals on 16 July 1998. Aberdeenshire Council was asked to make available for inspection at its offices copies of the electoral ward boundary descriptions, electoral statistics and illustrative maps. Additionally, copies of our proposals were sent to all who had received our consultation letter or had expressed an interest. We asked that any comments should be made to us by 13 August 1998. In light of an early representation from the Council our Secretariat agreed to informally extend the period for consultation to 5 September 1998.

Consideration of Representations

56. One hundred and two representations were received within the extended consultation period.

- **Auchterless/Inverkeithny Community Council** considered that the period for consultation was insufficient. It opposed changes to the wards and the increase in councillors which would cost an additional £250,000. The present councillors were carrying out their duties and did not require extra help to run the present wards. Changes in boundaries would split communities, which had great affinities for each other, and the numbers game did not work in rural areas. The issue should be left until the new Scottish Parliament was up and running.
- **Benholm - Johnshaven Community Council** wrote to say that information which would allow it to make comments on the provisional proposals had not been received until 1 September 1998 and that comments would be forwarded. No further correspondence had been received by the time of our meeting to consider representations made in response to our provisional proposals.
- **Catterline, Kinneff and Dunnottar Community Council** wished to retain existing boundaries which they considered best served community ties.
- **The Community Council of Cluny, Midmar and Monymusk** expressed displeasure at the proposed changes at a time when financial considerations were paramount. Existing councillors in its area served ably and additional councillors would not provide additional benefits.
- **Hatton of Fintry and Kinellar Community Council** wrote to say that it was happy with the existing arrangements and the services of the present councillor and saw no need for change. It would make more sense to postpone any changes until after the election of the Scottish Parliament thus allowing time for proper public consultation rather than bulldozing through proposals as appeared to be the case. The proposed changes were based on electoral parity and involved no consideration of established affiliations between settlements which must be taken into account before any changes were proposed. The maps used were not the most up-to-date and did not show recent additions to towns. The increase in Ward 51 was stated as being 51 electors, whereas new build in the area would add some 300 houses before 2001. Proper research had not been carried out. At a time of cutbacks, the electorate would question any increase in the number of councillors.
- **Inverurie Community Council** stated that it remained of the view that the boundary changes were not appropriate.

- **Kemnay Community Council** opposed the proposals because there had been several changes of boundaries since 1974 and the new arrangements would again cause confusion, especially because of the arrangements for the elections to the Scottish Parliament. Parity had been set at 2,600 electors but, if the population increased, it wondered if there would need to be a further review. People should be close geographically to ward centres to promote a sense of community spirit, which was more important than electoral parity. Under the revised arrangements neighbours could have different councillors and MPs; there was no obvious improvement in democratic representation and more councillors would make decision making a more lengthy and difficult task. The proposals would mean additional expense that could be better spent on improving facilities. Quality rather than quantity of councillors was more important and it would be difficult to find more councillors.

The Community Council considered that it would be more sensible to link the area north of Kemnay and the Bogbeth Road with Kintore or Inverurie because, under the provisional proposals, electors would have to drive through Kemnay to reach the Echt Ward.

- **Lumphanan Community Council** stated that it did not support the changes which meant that Lumphanan was included in Upper Donside for the only reason of ensuring electoral parity.
- **Mearns Community Council** wrote to oppose the proposal for 68 councillors which it considered unnecessary in the current economic climate. However, if the proposal was to proceed, it believed that the provisional proposals cut across traditional boundaries formed over many years and it considered that care should be taken to link traditional communities. The Community Council strongly recommended the draft scheme submitted by Aberdeenshire Council.
- **Mid Deeside Community Council** objected to the proposals because the increase in the number of wards would increase administrative costs to the detriment of electors who ultimately bore that cost. Further, there were groupings of disparate communities which had few common interests and a Councillor elected to these areas would be handicapped and would not be seen as properly representing local interests. The existing wards should be retained.
- **New Pitsligo Community Council** was against the proposals which were considered to ignore historical or geographical and social background considerations. Further, there would be an increase in Council Tax.
- **Newtonhill Muchalls and Cammachmore Community Council** was largely in agreement with the proposals in its area but objected to the increase in the number of councillors which was a waste of public money.

- **North Kincardine Rural Community Council** acknowledged receipt of the provisional proposals and noted that the Council had asked for an extension of the period for consultation until 11 September 1998. The Community Council was not scheduled to meet until 24 August 1998. No further comments were received from the Community Council during the extended consultation period.
- **Portlethen and District Community Council** stated that it would have been more sensible to send each Community Council a set of maps showing existing boundaries and proposed changes. It was concerned that account had not been taken of planning applications for new housing and wondered why outlying farms etc. had been associated with lower Deeside. It wondered if there was a hidden agenda to extend the boundaries of Aberdeen City. It wondered if the Commission had any local connections who could identify with areas in Aberdeenshire. It thought that the Community Council should have been consulted earlier rather than rush proposals through now. The main concern, however, was the additional financial burden the changes would mean in terms of councillor's meals, allowances and expenses claims. The only positive outcome was that three councillors would now attend Community Council meetings, thereby increasing the helpful advice available.
- **Stonehaven and District Community Council** wrote to say that it was concerned about the timescale for consultation. It objected to the number of councillors proposed for the Council area at a time when finances were tight. It believed that it was unfortunate that boundaries were drawn to what it considered mathematical needs which split communities and disregarded the people whom local government was intended to serve. Ward 65 should be called 'Stonehaven South West and Mearns North' and the name 'Stonehaven' should be included in the names of the 4 wards which covered the town.
- **Strathbogie Community Council** wrote to say that the increase in councillors would result in extra Council Tax and that those living in rural areas paid heavily for a limited range of services. It believed that the Council had operated successfully with 47 members and that the increase would be too large to be workable and would create problems of accommodation for meetings. The Community Council believed that the Government policy was to reduce the size of Councils and there was no point in increasing numbers at this point in time. To impose the changes would also cause confusion, particularly if they were in place before the 1999 elections. It believed that the proposals for Huntly were flawed because the maps did not show significant new housing developments and it could be assumed that if the maps were out of date then the same could be said for the statistics. The boundaries in Huntly seemed illogical, following rear curtilages in places, rather than streets. In some areas the boundaries crossed Parliamentary Constituency boundaries which would cause confusion. It was thought that the proposals undermined the strengths of Community Councils. There was no justification for the changes proposed which represented an unhealthy obsession

with electoral parity. The issue should be deferred until the Scottish Parliament was established.

- **Turriff and District Community Council** was opposed to the increase in the number of councillors and considered that its previous comments had been ignored. Public consultation was a waste of time as the Commission would not be dissuaded from its original course. The Community Council also opposed the increase in the number of councillors and supported Aberdeenshire Council's view. When Council budgets were being cut it was a complete waste of tax payers' money to have extra representatives.
- **Tarves Community Council** considered that it would be wrong for the revised electoral arrangements to be made in advance of the election of the Scottish Parliament which would be the appropriate institution to consider alterations to the present system. The number of councillors proposed for Aberdeenshire would simply add to the costs of Local Government and would also present a problem in finding sufficient people of the appropriate calibre who had the time and inclination to stand as councillors. Concern was also expressed about the limited time for consultation and the non-availability of maps. There was, however, some merit in the proposals for the area, although Aberdeenshire Council would suggest some minor changes.
- **Udny Community Council** objected to the proposals. The increase in Councillor numbers would cost an additional £300,000, which was regarded as unacceptable. The proposals separated villages and, in particular, Udny Castle and Post Office from the village of Udny Green, which would inevitably lead to confusion regarding which councillor had responsibility for issues arising in the local area. The Community Council was concerned over the location and frequency of polling stations. While the Community Council understood the reasons for the changes, it did not agree that they would bring benefits and, in any event, benefits which accrued would be outweighed by the disruption caused in the change of a councillor who operated effectively.
- **West Garioch Community Council** considered that, after the recent reorganisation, another change would be extremely detrimental to its close knit community. It had worked hard during the past three years at developing a good working relationship with its elected member and the Commission's proposals would undo all the good work. It believed that the Commission did not realise the impact that the inaccurate, poorly delivered package with indecipherable maps would have on rural communities and that consultation had been limited, because the proposals had been published during the summer recess. It was diabolical to divide the area at the Back o' Bennachie where the many small villages had always related to each other. Under the proposals, the village of Oyne which would become a suburb of Inverurie some 12 miles away, which was nonsensical. Rural areas had no affinity with towns and would soon be swamped and

suffocated. Old Rayne and Pitmacahie, separated by the A96, would be in two separate wards with electors residing at the latter having to travel to Inch to vote, which was ludicrous. Both Oyne and Rayne would be separated from the heart of Inch and District.

The Community Council understood that the majority of Councils in Scotland would benefit from a reduction in wards and financial gain. Aberdeenshire was uniquely rural and should be given special consideration. The additional 21 wards proposed would cost an estimated £250,000. Rural communities with hardships in farming, unemployment and infrequent expensive public transport could not afford to bear the brunt of such an increase in Council Tax charges, cuts in education and other services. The residents of the Back o' Bennachie were contented and happy and the boat should not be rocked.

- **Councillor Swapp** wrote to say that Ward 65 in the Council's scheme took full account of community ties and produced acceptable electoral parity compared with that in the Commission's proposals. It made more sense to keep Fettercairn intact and retain Mearns South where it belonged in community and geographic terms. Catterline had always been associated with Stonehaven and Dunnottar and it made no sense to divide Dunnottar and link a part with Inverbervie. The Councillor considered that the A90 made a poorly defined boundary in community terms. The Councilor stated that the Commission's improvements to the wards south of Stonehaven were marginal and that in the Council's scheme the wards were within the 10% tolerance for rural wards. It was important to keep communities intact and respect community links rather than to improve what the Councillor believed was already acceptable electoral parity. He would be interested to know how the forecast electorate for Ward 66 was calculated, given that there was little new build planned in the area.

Councilor Swapp wrote further to say that the number of wards in Mearns should remain unchanged and that there should be 47 wards in Aberdeenshire Council area. If the number of wards had to increase, then the Council's proposals were preferred. If the Council's proposals were unacceptable, changes could be made to the Inverbervie, Gourdon and Johnshaven Ward where the electorate was too large. Other consequential changes could be made to produce acceptable parity in adjoining areas. He thought that Inverbervie and (3ourdon should be in the same ward. Dunnottar should remain intact and retain its links with Stonehaven. Electorate data were provided to demonstrate how the issues could be addressed.

- **Malcolm Bruce MP** wrote to say that he objected to the consultation period beginning in July and ending on 12 August because it was ridiculous to ask a Council to respond to the document at a time when it was not in session. He noted that it was also a time of the year when most Community Councils and residents' associations took a break from convening. He believed that the provisional proposals could have been issued earlier.

Mr Bruce stated also that he was fundamentally opposed to the review and that a strict formula had been applied which took no account of the effect the proposals had on the communities in Aberdeenshire. He had written to the Minister of State to express his concerns.

Mr Bruce was sure that individual community associations would write to the Commission with regard to specific boundary issues and mentioned that Inverurie, the largest settlement in his constituency, would be carved up by the proposals which excluded new development at the north of the town. He believed that this was wholly unacceptable and resulted from the Commission dividing up wards using the number of houses irrespective of any existing geographical or physical boundaries.

Mr Bruce believed that democratic accountability would not be achieved by throwing more councillors at the electorate, which would lead to bureaucracy within the Council and resentment from the electorate who would see the increase in councillors as expensive and unnecessary. He believed that continued objection from himself and the Council should leave the Commission in no doubt that the proposed changes were wanted by virtually no one. He had asked the Minister of State to allow the May 1999 elections to proceed on the basis of existing boundaries so that the Scottish Parliament could consider the case for a review.

- **Alex Salmond MP** wrote to say that he was strongly against the proposal to increase the number of councillors in Aberdeenshire Council area. Councillors, Community Councils, interested organisations and individuals in his constituency were opposed to the planned increases.

Mr Salmond felt that a period of stability was required in local government and the review came too soon after reorganisation. Redrawing the boundaries so soon would lead to confusion amongst the electorate. Further, the increase in the number of councillors would mean increased costs to the Council which would have to be borne by already overstretched council coffers. The present structure was adequate for the purpose. He noted that a number of villages and local communities would be split into more than one ward and believed that this was undesirable for obvious reasons.

Mr Salmond believed also that there would be difficulties if the proposed changes went ahead because the elections for the Council would be fought on the same day as those for the Scottish Parliament and there was scope for confusion. There would also likely be additional expense in the opening and manning of polling stations. The Commission should reconsider its proposals.

- **Sir Robert Smith, Bt MP** wrote to register his objections to the increase in the number of wards and to the timescale for the public consultation period. He stated

that there was no need and no support for the increase in councillor numbers. Whilst the Council had a large rural area, there was also a number of largish towns and councillors past and present found no difficulty associated with the sizes of the existing wards. Any review should seek to equalise size across the authority at or around the present average. Further, to allow only one month for consultation in the middle of a holiday period was unacceptable. The full Council, and Community Councils, would be excluded from the consultation period as meetings would not have resumed following the summer break. The timescale of the review led him to believe that the changes were being rushed through unnecessarily and that they should be suspended until the Scottish Parliament was established so that the matter could be looked at afresh.

Sir Robert wrote further to reassert his opposition stating that, whilst the Commission was required to bring forward recommendations in time for the 1999 Local Government elections, the impression was of a review being rushed. It was becoming clear that it would be difficult to implement changes without creating a major headache for Electoral Registration Officers. There had been little time for local communities and their representatives to make their voices heard. Far from improving local democracy, forcing through the proposed unpopular changes would leave many disillusioned by the system. He was specifically concerned about proposals to include parts of Deeside with Upper Donside. Copies of correspondence he had received from constituents and Community Councils were forwarded.

- **West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine Conservative and Unionist Association** wrote to express concerns about the name chosen for Ward 65 which made no mention of Stonehaven despite the fact that it contained a part of the town. It proposed a change to 'Stonehaven West and Mearns'.
- **Alehousewells Residents' Association** stated that the proposed changes were unnecessary and would mean an increase in the number of councillors and an unnecessary rise in the level of Council tax. The proposed changes would mean a further 21 councillors who each received on average between £15,000 and £20,000. Not enough time had been allowed for consultation.
- **Tarves Amenity Group** wrote to say that it broadly accepted the provisional proposals but understood that Aberdeenshire Council might make some slight changes, which the Group agreed with. The Group, however, thought that it was unfortunate that the existing ward system had been given insufficient time to prove itself. There was a general feeling that there should be no increase in councillors which would in turn add to the costs of local government. It considered that the question of local government organisation should be looked at by the Scottish Parliament and making changes now would be wasteful if the whole issue was to be re-examined in a short time.

- **Westhill and District Residents' Association** wrote to say that the proposed increase in councillors appeared to be at odds with the financial pressures under which the Council operated and would presumably lead to increased costs. The division of Westhill into 3 wards would cause a significant dilution of strong ties. Residents in Ward 45 would attend schools in Ward 46 but their councillor would have no local link and attendance at School Board meetings was one obvious problem. Further, the Councillor's commitments would be split between Westhill and Blackburn, which was a completely different town.

The Association appreciated the need to comply with the local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 but noted that the mixture of rural areas which had seen little growth and urban areas which had grown considerably made it difficult to apply the statutory rules when considering Aberdeenshire. The Association suggested that the parity figure for the Council's area should be raised, urban and rural areas should be given different parities or a greater variation from parity should be allowed when dealing with areas of high populations. It believed that the net outcome would be to allow Westhill to retain its integrity and be represented by two councillors who would be able to focus on local issues without having to consider the different needs of other areas. The Association considered that the proposed boundaries seemed to contradict the statutory rules.

- A letter was received which asked that the Commission forward some informative literature which explained the reasons for the proposed changes which would help put the views of existing councillors into perspective.
- A letter was received which stated that it was totally illogical to associate a small part of Cammachmore with Lower Deeside when there was no relationship with the school catchment area, local hotel, garage, water and refuse services and postal and telephone areas.
- A letter was received which stated objection to the proposed increase in the number of councillors which would increase Council Tax and did not comply with the Government's best value regime. The time allowed for consultation was considered to be thoughtless. Mearns North ward should be renamed 'Stonehaven South and Mearns'.
- A letter was received which objected to the parish of Udney being divided. It considered this was the most stupid and ludicrous proposition, brought benefits to no one and created more voting apathy. There was concern that the name Udney would disappear. Further, the increase in wards would inevitably lead to an increase in the Council Tax. The status quo should prevail.
- Eight letters objected to the proposals for Udney stating broadly the same reasons as those offered by the Community Council.

- A letter was received objecting to the proposals in Udney. Udney Green encircled what was known as Christ's Green and it was hard to imagine that the castle would be separated from the Green by an imaginary line. In recent times attempts had been made to encourage closer community ties between Udney Green and Pitmedden. A new burial ground was planned and it was important for the community that it was a burial ground for both villages in the parish, as had been the old one. The result of the proposed changes would also mean that Udney Post Office and Udney Castle and its occupants would be in Tarves, which was not very sensitive. The Commission should reconsider.
- A letter was received which considered that the timing of the review was too soon after reorganisation and that the proposed increase in numbers could not possibly be justified. There was a need for quality in councillors, not quantity. Community Councils and community organisations should be used to bring local issues to the people. The proposals for a ward that linked Fettercairn with Stonehaven did not make sense. The Commission should seek powers to postpone or scrap the review, which was misconceived and unnecessary.
- Eighteen proforma letters from residents of Stonehaven were received which stated that increasing the number of councillors was irresponsible and against the wishes of the people. The proposals could add £250,000 to the Council Tax bill and did not comply with the Government's best value regime.
- Thirty-nine letters were received from the Westhill area. It was variously stated that it was ridiculous that the Commission could contemplate increasing the number of councillors in Aberdeenshire to a level which was more than the number that served on Grampian Regional Council which had included Aberdeen City and Moray. There was no need or desire for the increase and the additional expense could not be afforded.

It was considered that the proposals were ludicrous as they split Westhill and associated part of the area with Kinellar and Blackburn several miles away. The present councillors were happy with the existing wards and did not consider that the cost of another councillor was necessary. The Councillor for the additional ward would have responsibilities for two diverse areas. The local facilities were in a different ward and the councillor for the additional ward would have no direct links with them. Westhill was a suburban area whilst Kinellar was rural. The issues faced were different and it made no sense to split the electorate because this would result in less effective representation. Westhill children walked to school but those from Kinellar travelled by bus. Residents of Westhill used either Westhill shopping centre or Aberdeen but residents of Kinellar used Kintore, Blackburn or Dyce. New developments surrounding Westhill affected all of the residents but developments in Kinellar were focused on Blackburn or were more widely spread throughout the area. The present number of councillors was

adequate. It was nonsensical to have electorate in a ward which was separated from the shopping, medical facilities, church and swimming pool etc.

Objections raised by Aberdeenshire Council and Westhill District Residents' Association, which had the best knowledge of the area and the needs of the people, should be heeded. It was the Commission's duty to abandon the proposed changes unless it could prove to the electorate that there was a substantial majority in favour of the additional expense.

- A letter was received which stated that the present arrangements worked well. There was no demand for changes which would bring no discernible improvement in representation and the additional number of councillors would cost more. The review was a waste of taxpayers money
- Two letters were received which stated that the correspondents' local councillor had informed them that the increase in councillors would cost £350,000 - £450,000. It was thought that the increased costs were not acceptable.
- A letter was received which stated that the public were fully aware that consultation was a term not worth the paper it was written on. The quality of persons wishing to become councillors was not, in most instances, manual working class but middle class. This did not give a true representation and increasing the number of councillors would do nothing to resolve the position. Councillors were not giving their best because of the known party political outcome. The changes would lead to higher Council taxes and more needless debate with little heed being paid to Community Councils which were being pushed further into obscurity. In Aberdeenshire, councillors were still operating as if they were under District control and it was time that a system was put in place which would benefit the people.
- **Aberdeenshire Council** wrote to say that it had put a case to the Commission, formally and informally, on several occasions stating that it believed that the review was too broadly based and too fundamental in its effects and that it should instead deal with anomalies within the Council's area. Part of the Council's case was that there were changes taking place in the national context within which the Council operated and, since these changes were continuing, the Council maintained its general objections.

The Council considered that the 'formula' approach, which the Commission regards as providing equity across Scotland, was arbitrary. It believed that the Commission did not have a duty to devise a formula across Scotland, but only to achieve equity in the review for each Council. Further, it believed that the criteria used by the Commission to classify Council areas, in its application to Aberdeenshire in particular, appeared flawed. The use of a figure of 10,000 to distinguish between urban and rural communities was not appropriate in

Aberdeenshire. It concluded that there were other definitions of rurality, accepted by The Scottish Office, which suggest a figure of 4,000. The Council disputed that 68 councillors were appropriate for effective management of business. It believed that the increase in numbers would create further disruption at a time when it was undesirable, make it more difficult for effective decision making and incur practical difficulties through increases in costs and accommodation. It further concluded that the reduction in the number of electors per councillor would have no impact on the ability of councillors to carry out their tasks.

The increase in councillors would be thoroughly disruptive, requiring new approaches and structures and the rebuilding of shared understanding following the next elections. A Council of 68 members might well have a majority of new councillors, disrupting continuity and stability at a time when steps taken to set up the organisation needed to be consolidated. The size of the new Council might suit traditional approaches in urban Councils but Aberdeenshire had established a lean, decentralised system of committees which suited the nature of the Council area and the Community. A larger committee structure would be less effective, efficient and economical and, the Council estimated, would cost a further £250,000 per annum for the additional members plus additional staffing to support the expanded structure and the costs of additional accommodation.

The Council also believed that the context within which the Commission's proposals have to work had changed radically since the review started early in 1996. The Government's Best Value regime had established that there should be local solutions for local circumstances and this strengthened the argument against a formula based approach and against assumptions about what size of Council is appropriate for effective management. National changes since 1996 meant also that there were now strong objections to using the formula-based approach in isolation from other matters. The Government had called for a 'constitutional revolution' to improve the effectiveness of democracy in Scotland and to make the voice of the citizen and of the customer a more effective influence on the decisions and actions of elected bodies. This clear trend in Government thinking was likely to have a wide range of practical consequences for Councils and the Scottish Parliament which would require substantial and concrete changes in the ways in which Councils operated. Compared with these changes, an adjustment of the average electorate per councillor would be of minor practical effect. The Council believed that the use of a formula was an option which should be considered as part of a 'package of approaches' which together contributed to the Government's overall objectives on constitutional reform. It concluded that the Government had shown interest in the proposal that generally there should be a smaller number of councillors with a redefined role and, if that suggestion was to come to fruition, the disruption caused by the Commission's proposals would be to no purpose.

The Council believed that the period for formal consultation, arising during a school holiday period, was inadequate and did not allow a reasonable opportunity for interested parties to give the provisional proposals adequate consideration.

The Council believed also that the Commission's proposals differed from its own draft scheme through the Commission's desire to achieve greater parity of electors based on estimates for 2001. The Council concluded that the results were unsatisfactory.

The Council asked that an Assistant Commissioner be appointed to consider the views of relevant parties, the local implications of the approach to the review adopted by the Commission and the detailed implications of boundaries proposed by the Commission.

57. We noted that the Council considered that our classification of Council areas in Scotland was arbitrary and that the Commission had no duty to achieve equity of electorate across Scotland. As we mention earlier in our report, during the passage Through Parliament of the 1994 Act, there was cross-party agreement for the review of electoral arrangements to resolve such issues as the apparent disparity in representation between and within Council areas. We concluded that the methodology we adopted to classify Council areas was necessary to an objective and rational determination of Council size across Scotland. We concluded also that our decision to classify Council areas was acceptable within the terms of the legislation governing the review of electoral arrangements.

58. We noted that the Council considered that our methodology was flawed in its application to Aberdeenshire Council area and that there were other definitions of rurality accepted by the Scottish Office. Elsewhere in this report, we set out how proposals regarding the number of councillors for each Council area were formulated and how, during the initial period of consultation, our Deputy Chairman and Secretary visited every Council to discuss the methodology and to offer the opportunity for Councils to set out alternatives which could be applied across Scotland. Had alternative methodologies been offered, they would undoubtedly have been given the fullest consideration. No alternatives were offered during the period of consultation. However, a few Councils suggested modifications to the classification and, following detailed consideration of what was proposed, our underlying criteria were amended accordingly. We concluded that, in the absence of any alternative methodology being offered by any Council, it would not be appropriate or practicable to reconsider the question of classification once the main review exercise was under way.

59. We noted the Council's view regarding the context within which our proposals for Aberdeenshire Council area would have to work and that it believed national changes since 1996 meant that there were now strong objections to the approach adopted by the Commission being used in isolation from other matters. We concluded that the changes referred to by the Council could not constrain the conduct of our review of revised electoral arrangements which was subject to the statute in force. In the absence of amending legislation, the Commission had a duty to discharge its obligations as set out in the 1973 and 1994 Acts.

60. We noted the views of the Council and others regarding the costs associated with the revised number of councillors but, as we mention elsewhere, such matters are for consideration by The Scottish Office and the Council.

61. We noted the assertion that the Commission's proposals would result in an increase in the number of councillors operating in the area of Aberdeenshire Council prior to 1 April 1996. Such an assertion is inaccurate and the Commission's proposals would in fact result in a reduction of two in the number of councillors operating in Aberdeenshire prior to the last reorganisation.

62. We noted the view of the Council, Community Councils and others that the period for consultation was inadequate, was during the summer holiday period and did not allow reasonable opportunity for interested parties to give the provisional proposals adequate consideration. Our Secretariat agreed informally to extend the period of consultation to 5 September 1998. All representations received by that date were considered prior to our proposals for revised electoral arrangements being finalised. We noted also that the timing of our consultation period broadly mirrored the consultation period the Council adopted for consideration of its draft proposals in 1996.

63. The Council believed that the provisional proposals differed from its own draft scheme through the Commission's desire to achieve greater parity based on the forecast of electorate at 2001 and that the results were unsatisfactory. As we mention above, the Council and others asked that an Assistant Commissioner be appointed. We concluded that it would not be appropriate for an Assistant Commissioner to consider the methodology underlying the Commission's approach to the review. We concluded also that there were no other sound reasons why an Assistant Commissioner should be appointed and that sufficient detailed information was available to allow consideration of representations made in respect of the provisional proposals.

64. On 3 September 1998, staff of the Grampian Joint Valuation Board informed our Secretary that the Council proposed a number of amendments to the provisional proposals. Further, the Council had included in its proposed amendments new housing developments which were likely to be completed and occupied by 2001. Some statistical details of the proposed amendments were faxed to the Commission. Following an initial assessment of the information, our Secretary visited the Grampian Joint valuation Board office in Aberdeen on 4 September 1998 to discuss in detail the proposed amendments.

65. We noted that the Council's proposed amendments, which included new housing data not available at the time the Council's draft scheme was submitted, assumed that the electorate in Aberdeenshire Council area would rise to approximately 182,000 by 2001. We noted also that the latest General Register Office forecast of 18+ population for Aberdeenshire at 2001 was 178,581 and that our Secretariat's 1996-based forecast of the electorate was 178,593. We further noted that the 1998 electoral register indicated that the total electorate in Aberdeenshire was currently in the order of 173,200 electors. We also noted that forecasts of electorate based on new house building were generally inflated because they did not take into account household creation and other demographic changes. We concluded that it was unlikely that the electorate of

Aberdeenshire would increase to 182,000 by 2001 which would represent a growth of more than 3,000 in the total electors since the Council's initial draft scheme was prepared and an increase of approximately 9,000 electors between 1998 and 2001. From recent electoral roll data, we noted that in a number of areas in Aberdeenshire the electorate was in decline. We noted also that the Council's own small area population estimates and forecasts, 1998 update, did not support such a large increase in the electorate.

66. We concluded that it would be appropriate to include electors attributed to new house building, if the new information was applied across all wards in the Council area. However, we concluded also that the forecast of electorate for the Council area at 2001 should remain at the level indicated in the Council's draft scheme. We noted that the ward-level forecast of electorate at 2001 would need to be revised. We examined a number of ways by which the ward-level forecasts could be rationally revised and concluded that a method, which gave appropriate weight to the local increases in electorate attributed to new housing, was desirable. Accordingly, the electorate attributed to new housing was added at ward level to the original forecasts of electorate at 2001. The Council's original forecast of electorate, 179,141, was then redistributed according to the proportion of electorate in each of six sub-area groupings of wards. At ward level, the revised total for each of the six sub areas was redistributed according to the proportion at ward level of the original ward figure plus the new build electorate.

67. We then considered the effect on divergence from parity of the revised figures and the effect that adapting various amendments proposed by the Council would have.

68. In the Banff/Buchan area, we adopted the change proposed between the boundaries of Wards 2 and 3. We also agreed to amend the boundary between Wards 9 and 10 which involved no electorate. We rejected the proposed changes between Wards 5 and 6, which resulted in parities of 7% and -17% respectively at 2001. Similarly, we rejected the change proposed between Wards 7 and 12. Parity at 2001 in Ward 12 was -14% and the proposal further increased the imbalance at ward level in this area.

69. In the Buchan area, we noted that the Council preferred a solution which provided six wards for the Peterhead/Boddam area and created a new ward around Mintlaw, Old Deer and Fetterangus. Both proposals required substantial changes to adjacent ward boundaries.

70. We noted that recent electoral roll data suggested that there had been a general decline in the electorate in and around Peterhead. We noted also that there were no other representations requesting that the boundaries set out in our provisional proposals be changed. Further, the information provided by the Grampian Joint Valuation Board staff suggested that the six wards preferred by the Council for this area would, in the main, be over-represented at 2001. We were, therefore, not prepared to alter our provisional proposals in the Peterhead/Boddam area.

71. With regard to the proposed revision which affected Mintlaw, Old Deer and Fetterangus, we concluded that, overall, the provisional proposals produced reasonably balanced wards which were similar in size and we were therefore not prepared to amend ward boundaries in this area.

72. In the Formartine area, we noted that the main problems arose from the significant elements of new building around Ellon and Belhelvie. In the Ellon area we adopted the revised boundaries proposed by the Council. We made changes which brought Ward 35, Belhelvie, closer to electoral parity, although the distribution of settlements and electorate in adjoining wards prevented any further changes because of the significant consequential alterations that would be required. By bringing Ward 35 closer to parity, consequential changes had to be made to Wards 29 and 34. These changes, however, went some way to addressing representations received in respect of the Udney area.

73. We noted that the Council requested a change in the boundary between Wards 25 and 26 but that our proposals produced two balanced wards which showed deviations from electoral parity of —4% and —6% and we were, therefore, not prepared to adopt changes which created an imbalance in this area.

74. In the Garioch area, we noted that the location of electorate associated with new build in the Inch area and the settlement pattern prevented any alteration to the boundaries we proposed for Ward 36, although the deviation from electoral parity at 2001 was 8%. In Ward 37, we noted that divergence from parity was of the same magnitude as that suggested in our provisional proposals and we therefore concluded that the boundaries in this area should also remain unchanged.

75. In considering the divergence from parity in Ward 42, Newmachar and Fintry, we noted that the geographic position of the ward, coupled with the location of the electorate attributed to new building, made it impossible to achieve a better balance of parity in this area. However, we adjusted the boundary between Wards 42 and 41, which went some way to alleviating the problem.

76. In Wards 45—47, which focused on Westhill, we adopted the revisions proposed by the Council but, in order to achieve a better balance in the area, made a number of consequential changes. We noted that a two ward solution for the Westhill area, which was preferred by a number of those making representations, was not possible because of the growth which had already taken place and the substantial new increase in electorate attributed to expected new build.

77. In the Marr area, we made changes to the boundary between Wards 48 and 49 to produce a better-defined boundary. We also made changes to Wards 55,56 and 57, which produced a better balance of electorate.

78. In the Kincardine and Mearns area, our revised forecast of electorate at ward level suggested that it would be possible to return to the Council's original scheme, although a number of changes would be necessary to take account of electorate attributed to new housing. Apart from Wards 67 and 68, the revised boundaries we propose move considerably closer to the Council's proposals and address a number of the representations we received from this area. However, because of the concentration of electorate attributed to new build in the Johnshaven area, it is necessary to transfer an area into Ward 68 in order to achieve a better balance.

79. Staff of the Grampian Joint Valuation Board raised a number of very minor boundary changes where they considered the boundary line described should be re-plotted. None of the changes proposed had an impact on electoral parity and we therefore adopted the amendments proposed.

80. In considering other representations received regarding our provisional proposals, we noted comments concerning the quality of the illustrative maps. The maps prepared for the Commission are based on the latest 1:10,000 raster images available from Ordnance Survey either presented at 1:10,000 scale or reduced to 1:50,000 scale in rural areas. We noted that the maps are for illustrative purposes only and that the written descriptions of electoral ward boundaries are considered definitive.

81. With regard to the provision of illustrative maps, the Commission does not have a budget that would allow for providing every Community Council in Scotland with maps of electoral arrangements in their areas. However, every attempt was made to provide Councils with sufficient copies for display in local offices.

82. We noted comments regarding the forecasts of electorate published with our provisional proposals. We noted that the overall forecast of electorate at 2001 submitted by the Council was broadly in line with the Commission's own forecast, and that of the General Register Office for Scotland 18+ of population at 2001. At individual ward level, the Commission accepted also the forecasts of electorate prepared by the Council. We noted that the Council, when preparing its draft proposals, was asked to include expected changes in electorate which would take place by 2001.

83. With regard to the association of various settlements, we noted that the structure of wards is determined, by and large, by the need to observe the statutory rules.

84. With regard to a suggestion that there was a hidden agenda to revise the administrative boundary of the Council area, we noted that our review is concerned with revised electoral arrangements for Aberdeenshire Council. There was no hidden agenda in our provisional proposals.

85. We noted the views regarding costs, but noted that such matters were for consideration of the Scottish Office and Aberdeenshire Council.

Final Recommendation

86. Having conducted the third statutory review of electoral arrangements for Aberdeenshire Council area in accordance with the procedures described above, we **recommend** that future electoral arrangements for the said Council should provide for a Council of 68 members.

87. The designation of the electoral wards that we recommend for Aberdeenshire Council, together with information which we have received from the Council as to the 1996 electorate and forecast 2001 electorate of the proposed wards, are set out at Appendix B to this report.

88. The boundaries of the proposed electoral wards are described in Appendix C and the following illustrative maps accompany this report:

Map	Area	Scale
1A	Aberdeenshire Council Area	1:50,000
1B	Aberdeenshire Council Area	1:50,000
1C	Aberdeenshire Council Area	1:50,000
1D	Aberdeenshire Council Area	1:50,000
1E	Aberdeenshire Council Area	1:50,000
2	Peterhead	1:10,000
3	Fraserburgh	1:10,000
4	Banff and Macduff	1:10,000
5	Turriff	1:10,000
6	Mintlaw	1:10,000
7	Huntly	1:10,000
8	Ellon	1:10,000
9	Inverurie	1:10,000
10	Westhill	1:10,000
11	Banchory	1:10,000
12	Portlethen	1:10,000
13	Stonehaven	1:10,000

Appendix B

Aberdeenshire Council Area Proposed Electoral Wards

Number	Name	Electorate	
		1996 (Actual)	2001 (Estimated)
a	b	c	d
1	Durn	2,380	2,506
2	Banff West and Boyndie	2,275	2,441
3	Banff	2,448	2,475
4	Aberchirder	2,366	2,493
5	Macduff	2,297	2,514
6	Gamrie-King Edward	2,395	2,499
7	Buchan North	2,411	2,545
8	Fraserburgh West	2,505	2,450
9	Fraserburgh North	2,541	2,534
10	Fraserburgh East	2,513	2,541
11	Fraserburgh South	2,384	2,477
12	Buchan North East	2,160	2,404
13	South Buchan	2,404	2,509
14	Central Buchan	2,611	2,703
15	Lonmay and St Fergus	2,537	2,659
16	Mintlaw-Old Deer	2,271	2,454
17	Mintlaw-Longside	2,406	2,486
18	Boddam-Inverugie	2,614	2,684
19	Blackhouse	2,556	2,643
20	Buchanhaven	2,576	2,679
21	Peterhead Central-Roanheads	2,638	2,687
22	Clerkhill	2,721	2,676
23	Dales-Towerhill	2,509	2,638
24	Cruden	2,366	2,582
25	Turriff West	2,393	2,523
26	Turriff East	2,114	2,431
27	Upper Ythan	2,250	2,490
28	Fyvie-Methlick	2,383	2,443
29	Tarves	2,702	2,735
30	Ythan	2,848	2,789
31	Ellon Town	2,392	2,615
32	Logic Buchan	2,846	2,801
33	Meldrum	2,568	2,585

34	Udny-Slains	2,695	2,690
35	Belhelvie	2,611	2,850
36	Insch	2,714	2,798
37	Chapel and Gadie	2,227	2,850
38	Inverurie North	2,578	2,530
39	Inverurie Central	2,523	2,544
40	Inverurie South and Port Elphinstone	2,441	2,577
41	Kintore and Keithhall	2,732	2,812
42	Newmachar and Fintray	2,406	2,970
43	Kemnay	2,384	2,491
44	Echt	2,612	2,541
45	Kinellar and Westhill North	2,565	2,822
46	Westhill Central	2,890	2,890
47	Elrick	2,217	2,825
48	Huntly West	2,541	2,620
49	Huntly East	2,712	2,707
50	Strathbogie	2,480	2,439
51	Donside and Cromar	2,612	2,622
52	Alford	2,479	2,712
53	Upper Deeside	2,621	2,676
54	Aboyne	2,544	2,685
55	Mid Deeside	2,703	2,734
56	Banchory West	2,701	2,748
57	Banchory East & Crathes	2,513	2,776
58	Lower Deeside	2,438	2,481
59	Portlethen North	2,616	2,726
60	Portlethen South	2,581	2,642
61	Newtonhill, Muchalls and Cammachmore	2,505	2,551
62	Stonehaven North and Fetteresso	2,345	2,734
63	Stonehaven Central	2,754	2,726
64	Stonehaven South	2,778	2,775
65	Mearns North	2,651	2,728
66	Mearns Central	2,287	2,635
67	Inverbervie, Gourdon and Johnshaven	2,710	2,762
68	Mearns South	2,576	2,733
	Total	171,127	179,141