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29 July 2021

Dear Beatrice

Thank you for your letter of 15 June, expressing concerns about the proposals put forward by Boundaries Scotland in their *Review of Electoral Arrangements of the Shetland Islands Council Area*, specifically the proposals for the Shetland West Ward. I am responding because the reviews undertaken by Boundaries Scotland are within my portfolio of responsibilities.

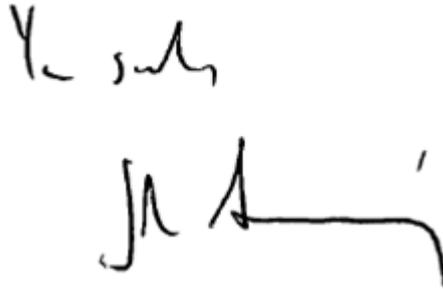
Boundaries Scotland's final proposals have been submitted and I now have a legal duty to lay regulations giving effect to the proposals as soon as is practicably possible. The Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020 removed ministerial discretion to modify or reject Boundaries Scotland's proposals. However the regulations will now be subject to affirmative procedure in the Scottish Parliament. This gives Parliament an enhanced role in scrutinizing the Boundary Commission's proposals and brings the procedure into line with that already in place for Scottish Parliament constituency boundaries.

I am aiming to lay the regulations in the Scottish Parliament in late August. The lead committee will take evidence from witnesses ahead of a debate on the motion to approve the regulations.

As an affirmative instrument, the motion to approve the regulations can only be accepted or rejected in its entirety by the Committee. If the motion for the approval of the draft instrument is rejected, Scottish Ministers will notify Boundaries Scotland that they are required to conduct a further review of the proposals. The extent of any further review would be determined by Boundaries Scotland, however the legislation requires that they consider any representations made by the Scottish Parliament in conducting any further review.

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You will appreciate that under legislation I have no discretion to modify or reject Boundaries Scotland's proposals. However, I appreciate the depth of concern expressed and I will ensure the Convener of the Committee is made aware of these concerns, once we know which Committee is to have responsibility for considering the statutory instruments.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Swinney', written in a cursive style.

JOHN SWINNEY

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