

Dear Editor

Final Reflections on Referendum Result of 18 September 2014

I have noted the view expressed in some quarters that local councillors should not get involved in national issues, like the recent referendum, and write to refute that. I was at the launch of the Better Together Campaign in Kinross-shire on 27 May and spoke in support of it.

My fellow opposition councillors Cuthbert and Robertson, along with myself, campaigned hard recently in support of a "NO" vote and our opposition to the break up of Britain. My constituents know that I have been opposed to the SNP's separatist agenda all my political life and this will continue. What happens nationally in government has a direct effect on local authorities and I think people expect their councillors to have a view on such matters and to show leadership, where necessary. The fact remains that by the end of its current term, the SNP Government will have frozen Council Tax for an unprecedented nine-year period, with consequential effect on public services locally, cuts that they of course blame Westminster Government for, as with most things.

I was heartened and relieved by the outcome of the referendum in Scotland in delivering a clear majority in support of us remaining part of the UK. In PKC, the NO vote at 62,714 far exceeded the YES vote at 41,475 on a very healthy 87% turnout. The highest ward turnout was Kinross-shire at 90% and I also understand that our ward had the highest percentage NO vote and lowest percentage YES vote in our council area, a fitting tribute to the many folk who campaigned locally.

I voted NO because I don't believe it is necessary to break up Britain in order to tackle Scotland's problems. I still had unanswered questions on citizenship/nationality, currency/financial services, the economy, land ownership reform and pensions/welfare after a seemingly interminable referendum debate bordering on a national self-obsession with little regards for the rest of the UK watching from the sidelines. I was completely against the division of Britain's armed forces in a very uncertain world, opposed to the SNP's proposed open borders for significant immigration and wanted a say in a promised referendum in the UK on reform of the EU.

The NO campaign won despite the flawed Edinburgh agreement negotiated by Cameron since the question put invited negativity from the unionist side. If the questions had been: Should Scotland remain part of the UK? Do you support a Devo Max/Federal solution for Scotland within the UK?, positive debate could have ensued. There should have been a threshold percentage for such an important vote rather than a simple majority. Whilst I support the lowering of the voting age, it should be for all elections.

The referendum bitterly divided communities, families and organisations; the campaign being full of enmity and intimidation, all caused by nationalism.

I have always supported the Liberal Federal Model for Britain with home rule parliaments for England (preferably outwith London), Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with full tax raising powers to fund their domestic programmes whilst a reformed Westminster retains control over currency matters, financial services, foreign affairs and macro-economic policy. I very much hope that the Smith Commission charged with agreeing more powers for Scotland can keep to its tight timescale and get an agreement from the parties involved that takes us closer to this model. I do not think that this timetable should be linked to answering the "West Lothian" question on English votes for English laws that Cameron suggested.

It is now time for the SNP Government under Sturgeon to get on with their mandate by using the extensive powers they already possess to make a difference in running Scotland, rather than continually advocating and campaigning that only independence (rejected by the majority of Scots) is a cure-all.

For my part, I continue to work behind the scenes up at Perth on a number of local environmental, planning and road issues of concern to my constituents for future reporting.

Kind regards

Councillor Mike Barnacle
Independent Councillor for Kinross-shire