

Executive Director: Douglas Hendry

Kilmory, Lochgilphead, Argyll, PA31 8RT
Telephone: [REDACTED]
Our Ref: DH/LB
If phoning or calling please ask for: Douglas Hendry
e-mail: [REDACTED]
Council Website: www.argyll-bute.gov.uk

24th September 2020

Mr Ronnie Hinds
Chair – Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland
Thistle House
91 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5HD

[REDACTED]

Dear Mr Hinds

2019 REVIEW OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS – ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL AREA

In response to the letter from the LGBCS on 16th July 2020, which set out the initial proposals for the Argyll and Bute Council area, the Council have now considered the proposals in detail and welcome the opportunity to provide the following response to the stage 1 consultation.

The Council are grateful for the efforts of the Commission to engage with us during the past couple of months, in particular attendance at the elected member seminar held on 10th August 2020 to discuss the proposals and to address member queries was appreciated.

The Council are content that the four Area Committee areas have remained unchanged, which from an administrative/governance point of view is welcomed. In addition, there is a general acceptance of the proposals with regard to those wards where no change is proposed to Councillor numbers or the boundary – Cowal, Dunoon, Lomond North, and Mid Argyll.

However, the Council are disappointed that the Commission's starting point, in a similar vein to the 5th Review that was undertaken in 2016, is to recommend a reduction in Councillor numbers for the Argyll and Bute area. In line with the Council's response at that time, the Council objects to the proposals in that they diminish the overall electoral accountability,



while failing to take into account material factors in relation to electoral parity, impact of demographic issues such as an ageing population and social and economic deprivation, and the consequent requirement for more effective electoral representation these factors create. On this basis, the Council rejects any reduction in the overall number of Councillors for Argyll and Bute

In addition, the proposals for Argyll and Bute seem to be at odds with the overall focus of the review, which is to recognise the importance of Scottish islands and the unique challenges they face. The same can be said of the approach taken in 2016, when the review was focussed on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. In both reviews, the proposals adversely impact the island of Bute, with Councillor representation being reduced, which would appear to be in conflict with the principles being applied. There are significant demographic and deprivation issues on Bute, for example 30% of the electorate are over the age of 64. On this basis the case can be made that there is a requirement for additional representation on the island of Bute and the proposals from the Commission are counter to this. Furthermore, maintaining the status quo on Bute (3 members) would bring the number of electors into closer parity with the proposals for the other island wards.

Overall, the proposals presented by the Commission, particularly in respect of the island wards, have raised a number of concerns for the Council in terms of electoral parity. For example, in respect of the wards for Islay, Jura & Colonsay (ward 2) and Mull, Iona, Coll & Tiree (ward 4) it is proposed that there are 4 Councillors covering a similar population to ward 9 - Bute, where it is proposed to have only 2 Councillors. Between ward 2 and ward 9 the forecast variation from electoral parity varies vastly from -24.4 to 13.8 respectively. Similar concerns can also be applied in respect of the proposals for ward 6 – Lorn, and the proposed boundary change within the Helensburgh and Lomond administrative area, which would inevitably result in the area being under-represented in terms of electoral parity in future years.

During the course of engagement with members on the proposals, a number of common points were captured with regard to the range of smaller islands within Argyll and Bute, which are currently included within mainland wards – Gigha, which sits within ward 1 – Kintyre, and Seil, Lismore, Luing, Easdale and Kerrera, which fall within ward 5 – Oban and ward 6 – Lorn. The Council are of the view that if, as part of the public consultation, there is a view that these islands should form part of the dedicated island wards proposed for their respective areas, then the Council would support this option being pursued.

A further boundary issue that the Council would like to see explored as part of the public consultation is in respect of proposed ward 1 – Kintyre, where it is suggested that the boundary for the Kintyre ward could stop at Kennacraig, with Tarbert and Skipness moving within the boundary of ward 3 - Mid Argyll. This would maintain the current Community Council boundary for Tarbert and Skipness, and the East and West Kintyre split. This proposal was raised at the Members Seminar held on 10th August 2020 and it is understood that the Commission have started looking at the implications of this.

The final issues that the Council would like to feedback on are in regard to the Mid Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands (MAKI) area which covers wards 1, 2 and 3, where there was differing opinions from members in respect of the proposals, particularly those for ward 2 – Islay, Jura and Colonsay. One perspective was that the status quo should remain for MAKI as there are no proposals to change overall Councillor representation, and the proposed boundary changes do not appear to provide a positive outcome for the area. It was considered, for



example, that having a 2 member ward for Islay, Jura and Colonsay has the potential to create workload issues and under-representation.

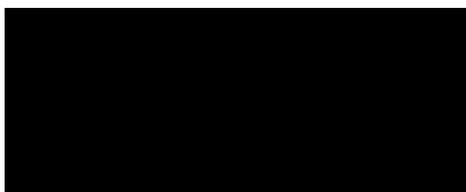
There was also a desire to take cognisance of a previous response submitted by the Council's Argyll Islands Strategic Group to the Islands (Scotland) Bill Consultation in September 2017, which noted the advantages of having councillor representation across both mainland and island areas to better represent the interests between island and mainland communities. Additionally, the consultation response submitted that the development of 1 or 2 member wards for inhabited islands would reduce the number of members representing islands as a whole.

Conversely, there was support for the creation of a dedicated island ward, which was deemed to be a positive step forward. During the 5th Electoral Review an Atlantic Islands ward was considered but at that time it was not possible to have a 2 member ward. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 has changed this position and therefore presents the opportunity to adopt an islands only ward.

The Council considers it important that the aforementioned issues are fully addressed and explored as part of the public consultation, to enable the views of communities in Argyll and Bute to be considered.

In addition, and although the Council recognises it may not directly relate to the Commission's remit, the Council considers that it is a matter of concern that the public consultation is being undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic when potentially further restrictions are being applied for the protection of the public, which could adversely impact the public consultation process and the work of the Commission overall.

Yours sincerely



Douglas Hendry
Executive Director

