



Local Government
Boundary Commission
for Scotland

Coimisean Crìochan na h-Alba
airson Riaghaltas Ionadail

2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements in Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire Council Areas

Guidance Booklet





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Introduction

Who we are

1. The Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland is an independent, non-political body responsible for carrying out reviews of councillor numbers and electoral wards which make up council areas.
2. Under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, we undertake reviews in the interests of effective and convenient local government in order to secure electoral fairness, which means that each councillor within a council area should represent broadly the same number of electors. Councillors represent electoral areas called wards.
3. We conduct electoral reviews at intervals of 8 to 12 years and take account of the factors set out in the 1973 Act. These say we must ensure:
 - the number of electors per councillor in each ward should be as equal as possible;
 - subject to this we must consider:
 - local ties that would be broken by fixing a particular boundary; and
 - the desirability of fixing boundaries that are easily identifiable, with the first of these taking precedence over the second;
 - we may depart from the strict application of electoral parity to reflect special geographical considerations.
4. The Commission is also responsible for carrying out reviews of council area boundaries and of constituencies and regions for the Scottish Parliament.

Why we are conducting these reviews

5. The population, and therefore the electorate, of any council area is constantly changing, with people moving into or out of areas as well as within the same area. As a result of these changes, some councillors may come to represent considerably more or fewer electors than others. These variations in levels of representation are one of the reasons that we carry out regular electoral reviews.
6. The current reviews of Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire Council areas are required under the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018. This Act recognises the unique needs of the Scottish islands and the particular opportunities and challenges they face. It offers additional flexibility allowing us to create wards that elect 1 or 2 councillors in wards with inhabited islands as well as the 3 or 4 councillor wards permitted elsewhere in Scotland. Since that Act was introduced, the Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020 now allows the use of 2 and 5-member wards across Scotland and our proposals reflect that flexibility.

Effective and convenient local government

7. It is not straightforward to provide a simple definition of “effective and convenient local government”. It is, however, the fundamental consideration for recommendations arising from any of our reviews.
8. Among the factors we recognise as contributing to effective and convenient local government are:
 - the ability of councils to manage and deliver all of the services they are responsible for in an efficient manner;
 - the ability of individual councillors to carry out their functions including representing the residents in their area; and
 - the ability of residents to access services and participate in local democracy effectively and conveniently.
9. Electoral reviews do not affect house values, council tax, insurance premiums, postcodes or school catchment areas.

Determining councillor numbers

10. We start to calculate the number of councillors for each council area by firstly placing it into a category with other similar councils. The categories we use are based on available data on geography and socio-economic characteristics. This includes a range of factors including data on: income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing. Central and local government also use this data in policy making and decisions on service delivery.
11. For each category, we assign a ratio of councillors to electors in order to calculate the appropriate number of councillors for each council.
12. For these reviews, Argyll and Bute and Highland council areas are grouped with other more rural council areas with a ratio of councillors to electors of 1:2,800. North Ayrshire is grouped with more urban council areas with a ratio of councillors to electors of 1:3,000.
13. We are aware that a large change of councillor numbers might be disruptive so we have incorporated a 10% change rule. This means that we will not propose increasing or decreasing the total number of councillors in a council area by more than 10%.
14. When we come to design wards we may adjust the exact number of councillors proposed by the methodology, if doing so means creating a pattern of wards that better meets the needs of the council area and delivers better parity. The number of councillors we initially propose for each council area currently under review is set out below.

Council area	Existing councillor numbers	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Electorate divided by ratio councillors per electors	Proposed councillor numbers
Argyll and Bute	36	66,725	$66,725 \div 2,800 = 24$	33*
Highland	74	183,541	$183,541 \div 2,800 = 66$	72*
North Ayrshire	33	106,851	$106,851 \div 3,000 = 36$	36

*10% change rule applied

15. In the case of Highland council area we recognised that the review of electoral arrangements that came into force in 2017 resulted in a reduction of 6 councillors. While the methodology suggests a further reduction of 8 councillors, we considered that it would not be helpful to propose a reduction of that size so soon after the last review. We have therefore applied the 10% cap on change to the 80 councillors Highland Council had before 2017 rather than the 74 it currently has.

Determining ward boundaries

16. Once we have agreed the number of councillors, the next stage of the review is to consider ward boundaries.

Councillors per ward

17. As mentioned earlier, for these reviews each ward can return either 2, 3, 4 or 5 councillors in any part of the council area or 1 member where a ward wholly or partly contains an inhabited island. The choice of the number of councillors for each ward will depend on the overall pattern of wards we feel best meets the requirements set out in paragraph 3 of this guidance.

Electoral parity

18. The principal aim of a review, as stated in the legislation governing our work, is to ensure a good level of electoral parity. This means, as far as possible, having the same number of electors per councillor in all wards of a council area. The legislation gives priority to electoral parity over other factors in ward design.
19. Applying strict electoral parity for a review, the number of electors for each ward would be:

Highland, Argyll and Bute	North Ayrshire
1 councillor ward = 2,800 electors	1 councillor ward = 3,000 electors
2 councillor ward = 5,600 electors	2 councillor ward = 6,000 electors
3 councillor ward = 8,400 electors	3 councillor ward = 9,000 electors
4 councillor ward = 11,200 electors	4 councillor ward = 12,000 electors
5 councillor ward = 14,000 electors	5 councillor ward = 15,000 electors

20. Best practice and previous reviews suggest an electorate within 10% of strict electoral parity is acceptable. This is intended to provide a reasonable degree of flexibility in most circumstances.
21. In designing wards, we consider special geographical circumstances that may apply and may consider moving away from strict electoral parity in those cases especially in remote areas and islands.

Electorate change

22. When aiming for electoral parity, we take into account the likely change in the number and distribution of the local government electorate over a five year period from the start of the review.
23. To do this, we collect data from each council area including on expected new residential development and demolition within its area over the five year period. Using this data, combined with data on the average number of electors per household in the area, and population projections for the same period from the National Records of Scotland, we calculate a forecast of electorate for the five year period.

Local ties

24. When designing wards, we aim to reflect local ties, and in particular we aim to avoid breaking local ties. However, other factors - especially electoral parity - may outweigh local ties.
25. For some, local ties could be defined by their community council area, school catchment area, or other historical connections. For island communities we may consider transport links to the mainland or other islands.
26. Major roads could be seen to be the focus of an area if they are the location of shops or community facilities which people visit regularly. Alternatively, major roads or rivers or other natural features could be seen as physical barriers marking the boundary between different communities. In sparsely populated areas, we may have to combine two or more distinct and separate communities within a single ward.

Easily identifiable boundaries

27. The legislation requires us to take into account the desirability of fixing boundaries that are and will remain easily identifiable.
28. In urban areas, a case can be made to define ward boundaries along roads since they are likely to remain clearly identifiable, and are unlikely to be straddled by new dwellings. As an alternative, drawing a boundary along the rear fences between houses will result in neighbours across a street being in the same ward which may better reflect local ties.
29. In rural areas, natural features such as rivers or streams and edges of woodland may be appropriate where a ward boundary is required. Field boundaries may also be used, while recognising that they may be subject to change, particularly in the case of fences. In upland areas, a watershed may be an appropriate ward boundary feature, particularly along narrow, well-defined ridges.

Special geographical considerations

30. We can move away from strict adherence to electoral parity for a ward where there are special geographical considerations that make it desirable to do so. Such considerations include areas where transport and communication links are slow, infrequent or subject to interference by the weather and seasons. Examples include distinct island communities, sparsely populated areas and remote areas.

Ward names

31. When considering ward names, we may use an existing ward name where there is a new ward that is recognisably similar and aim to propose ward names that are short rather than attempt to describe an area exhaustively. We welcome local views when recommending ward names.

Review Stages

Consultation

32. We consult with councils on our proposals for a period of at least 2 months before commencing consultation with the public. We aim to develop recommendations that are influenced by local input as far as possible. We publicise the review as widely as we can, and ask that local councils, political parties, community groups, other stakeholders and the general public do the same.
33. We publicise the start of the review and all consultations we undertake. We usually issue news releases and public notices in local newspapers, write to interested parties, place our proposals on display in public areas such as libraries and council offices and ask councils to help make our information materials available. We increasingly make use of social media to publicise our work and are keen to expand this for these reviews.
34. During public consultations we publish our proposals on our website and place copies of them in council offices and libraries.
35. We welcome views from individuals or community groups on any aspect of our proposals. You may, for example, want to comment on councillor numbers overall or just in the ward where you live. You may have thoughts on boundaries across the council area or on a specific boundary you think we could improve. Or you may want to suggest a different ward name. Whatever your thoughts, your contribution is welcome.
36. Responses can be made to the Commission via our online consultation website at www.consult.lgbc-scotland.gov.uk or by letter or email.
37. We will decide whether to amend our proposals once we have considered responses to our consultations. If we decide to make significant changes we may consult again or hold a local inquiry to find out more information.

Final Report

38. At the conclusion of our reviews we prepare our Final Recommendations and our Reports for Scottish Government Ministers. We submit our Reports to Ministers and provide a copy to each council for public display. We make the Reports available at the same time on our website.
39. The publication of our Final Recommendations marks the end of our role in the electoral review process. Approval of our Final Recommendations arising from these reviews will be subject to Scottish Parliament agreement. We have planned our work so that our recommendations from these reviews, if agreed, will be ready to be implemented for the local government elections in May 2022.

Further information

40. More detailed information about our reviews and the legislation governing our work is available on our website www.lgbc-scotland.gov.uk.
41. We are following the timetable laid out below for these reviews.

Stage	Date
1. Commission formally announces start of reviews	January 2019
2. Commission meets separately with the three Councils to provide background to the reviews and discuss its approach	Autumn 2019
3. Commission develops proposals on councillor numbers and ward boundaries	January – April 2020
4A. Consultation with councils on ward boundaries. (Two month statutory consultation period after which Commission considers responses)	July – September 2020
4B. Public consultation on ward boundaries	November 2020 – January 2021
5. Commission considers all representations and develops its Final Recommendations before submitting its Reports to Scottish Ministers	January-May 2021

