

2018 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies - Boundary Commission for Scotland Proposals

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides information on the Boundary Commission for Scotland consultation on its revised proposals relating to the 2018 Review of UK Parliament constituencies.

The revised proposals were prepared after considering the responses to its consultations on the Initial Proposals which were published in October 2016.

The Council previously considered the initial proposals in November 2016 and its response is outlined at paragraph 4.2.

The review is being conducted simultaneously by the four UK Parliamentary Boundary Commissions, and will result in a UK Parliament elected from 600 constituencies in place of the current 650, and in 53 constituencies in Scotland in place of the current 59.

Due to the reduction in the number of constituencies, and the requirements for each constituency to have a number of electors within set limits, changes to constituencies are required.

The proposal with respect to Argyll and Bute Council area is to establish an Argyll, Bute and Lochaber county constituency of 77,661 electors and an approximate area of 9,916 square kilometres. The proposed constituency boundary follows ward boundaries in Argyll and Bute and Highland council areas with one exception: Highland ward 12(part) (Caol and Mallaig), where the boundary generally follows community council area boundaries and the Caledonian Canal.

The Commission is consulting the public on Revised Proposals; it will produce Final Proposals in September 2018, and would expect to make final recommendations for constituencies in 2019. This phase of the consultation will run until 11 December 2017.

Recommendations

The Council is invited to consider the Boundary Commission revised proposals and determine its response with regards to the 2018 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report provides information on the Boundary Commission for Scotland consultation on its revised proposals relating to the 2018 Review of UK Parliament constituencies.

Under the proposals the Argyll and Bute constituency boundary will spread north to incorporate 2 wards within Highland Council including areas such as Fort William, Caol, Kilchoan and Ardnamurchan. The new constituency will be called Argyll, Bute and Lochaber and will have 77,661 electors.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council is invited to consider the Boundary Commission revised proposals and determine its response with regards to the 2018 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies.

4.0 DETAILBackground to the review

- 4.1.1 The 2018 review of UK Parliamentary constituencies is required by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986. It is being conducted simultaneously by the four Boundary Commissions in Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Across the UK, the number of constituencies is being reduced from 650 to 600. In Scotland there will be a decrease from 59 to 53 constituencies, with similar reductions in each part of the UK: England 501 in place of the current 533; Wales 29 in place of the current 40; and Northern Ireland 17 in place of the current 18.
- 4.1.2 The electoral quota for the review, which is the average electorate per constituency across the UK, is 74,769.2, with the electorate of each constituency having to be within five per cent of that. That means the smallest permitted electorate for a constituency is 71,031 and the largest permitted electorate is 78,507. The maximum permitted area is 13,000 square kilometres. In Scotland, exceptions to these limits apply for Na h-Eileanan an Iar constituency (the Western Isles), and Orkney and Shetland constituency, each of which are defined in the legislation.
- 4.1.3 An exception to the minimum electorate requirement can be made if a constituency is larger than 12,000 square kilometres which can only occur in

very sparsely populated areas.

- 4.1.4 Subject to the above requirements, the legislation states that the Boundary Commission may take into account, as it thinks fit, other factors, namely:
- special geographical considerations, including the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency;
 - boundaries of council areas and electoral wards;
 - existing Westminster constituency boundaries; and
 - any local ties which would be broken by changes in constituencies.

- 4.1.5 Due to the reduction in the number of constituencies, and the requirements for each constituency to have a number of electors within set limits, changes to constituencies are required. These proposed changes as set out on the Boundary Commission for Scotland's and are out for consultation until 11th December 2017.

- 4.2 The Council previously considered the initial proposals in November 2016 where it agreed to:

"In response to the initial proposals from the Boundary Commission for Scotland regarding the 2018 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies, the Council notes:

- That the Commission was required to propose constituencies with electorates of between 71,031 and 78,505;
- That the electorate of Argyll and Bute Council area is stated as 65,444;
- That the initial proposals place Argyll and Bute Council area within a wider constituency of Argyll, Bute and Lochaber;
- That the electorate of the new Argyll, Bute and Lochaber Constituency is stated as 77,574;

And, in responding to the Boundary Commission for Scotland the Council maintains the position that the future boundaries should reflect local community ties. On this basis it is suggested that the northern boundary be adjusted so that it more closely follows the former Argyllshire County Council Boundary, with the new constituency therefore including the full area of Argyll and Bute Council area, and in addition the catchment areas of Kinlochleven and Ardnamurchan High Schools from the Highland Council area."

- 4.3 Argyll, Bute and Lochaber Constituency

Under the revised proposals the current Argyll and Bute constituency boundary will spread north to incorporate 2 wards within Highland Council including areas such as Fort William, Caol, Kilchoan and Ardnamurchan. The new constituency will be called Argyll, Bute and Lochaber, will have 77,661 electors and cover an approximate area of 9,916 square kilometres. Geographically this is the third largest constituency in Scotland

- 4.4 These proposals are not dissimilar to those originally mooted in the 6th Review in 2011, however the current proposals have been revised since consideration by Council in 2016 and amendments have been made to incorporate parts of Ward 12 which includes Caol, Kilchoan and Ardnamurchan but not the Small Isles and Mallaig area. It also includes Highland Ward 22 which includes Fort William.

- 4.5 In the circumstances the proposed area and electorate meets the requirements laid down by statute. It is clear that there is no established link, other than an historical one, between the communities of Lochaber ward, and the rest of Argyll and Bute but it is fair to assess that the communities share similar issues around “island proofing”, remoteness, rurality, sparsity and economic challenges arising therefrom.

Election Responsibilities

- 4.6 With regards to the Returning Officer responsibilities for election administration the inclusion of the additional areas would involve cross boundary cooperation with Highland Council in regard to polling stations staff and other resources as well as creating a short term challenge for staff in familiarising themselves with the area of Lochaber. It would also be necessary to address the additional time for collection of ballot boxes and delivery to a count centre in Lochgilphead could mitigate against any night time counting of votes as the travel time from some of the outer areas such as Kilchoan to Lochgilphead is up to 4 hours and that would be after the arrival of all boxes from outlying areas.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The proposals are compliant with the legislative requirements placed on the Commission but represent a substantial increase in the geographic area of the constituency which will create the third largest in Scotland. Whilst the communities have similar characteristics they fall within different Local Authority areas and have little tradition of interaction with Fort William and the Lochaber area looking north to Inverness for all its public and private sector services.
- 5.2 The Council has always been keen to see co-terminosity of Council boundaries with electoral processes but given the parameters set by the commission that isn't possible. The addition of part of Highland Ward 12; Caol and Mallaig (3,772 electors) and Highland Ward 22 ; Fort William and Ardnamurchan (7,945 electors) to the Argyll and Bute wards electorate (65,944) means the constituency would operate within the necessary legislative parameter of between 71031 – 78,507 electors. The Council may wish to consider if there is any alternative option for the Council to meet these parameters
- 5.3 The Council is invited to consider the Boundary Commission revised proposals and determine its response with regards to initial proposals for the 2018 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

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| 6.1 | Policy | None |
| 6.2 | Financial | The costs of running an election will be increased but are met by Government. |
| 6.3 | Legal | None |
| 6.4 | HR | There will be an increased burden on council staff in supporting elections covering the enlarged area. |
| 6.5 | Equalities | None |

6.6 Risk None

6.7 Customer Service None

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3rd November 2017

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Appendix – Proposed revised Map