Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004

Review of Electoral Arrangements

Report by
Policy Development Group on Electoral Arrangements

November 2004
PREFACE

In anticipation of the review of electoral arrangements to be carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission, the Council established a Policy Development Group on Electoral Arrangements comprising Members drawn from each of the political groups represented on the Council. We are supported by officials from Corporate Services and Development Services.

We have met on a number of occasions and have been gathering both current and projected electorate data, as well as giving considerable attention to available information that helps to define perceived communities. We have met with and consulted Councillors on an area basis and also corporately.

We have also held a constructive and useful meeting with representatives of the Commission. As well as providing information about the basis and methodology the Commission intends to use, this meeting provided the opportunity for the Council to share issues that we believe are significant considerations for this review. Importantly, we formed four impressions –

- that the Commission will provide significant helpful information throughout the review
- that its approach is based on an open dialogue with the Council
- there is a clear desire on the Commission’s part to gather information from and the views of the Council
- there is a welcome recognition of the importance of designing wards that best reflect perceived communities

This paper concentrates on community focus and attempts to explain the complexity and uniqueness of how communities in Argyll and Bute are structured, and the importance of their individual distinctiveness. It is our intention that this should be helpful to the Commission.

Our thoughts will develop and what we say here will need development and refinement, and may be subject to revision, as more data becomes available and it is analysed. We look forward to working with, and assisting, the Commission during the review ahead. It is our intention, building on the work done so far, to produce before the end of the year a model or models relative to the possible shape and size of wards for Argyll and Bute that we hope will assist.

Councillor Dick Walsh
Chair

12 November 2004
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Located on the west coast of Scotland, Argyll and Bute is one of Scotland’s 32 councils. Its border runs through Loch Lomond, and adjoins Highland Council, Perth and Kinross, West Dunbartonshire and Stirling Council. The Council area covers the second largest geographical area of any Scottish local authority, stretching for over 100 miles from Appin in the north to Campbeltown in the south and more than 80 miles across from the island of Tiree in the west to Helensburgh in the east. The area has six towns, 25 inhabited islands and over 4,500km of coastline – more than the entire coastline of France.

2 DIVERSITY AND CONTRASTS

2.1 Argyll and Bute is a study in diversity. The population of 91,306 is spread over 690,900 hectares or just less than 7,000 sq km (2670 sq m) and encompasses bustling urban centres, tranquil rural villages and remote islands. The variety of experiences and life circumstances faced by residents rules out the possibility of defining the typical resident or the typical settlement. Statistics can provide mathematical average measures for the overall area, which in turn provides very useful information. However, as with any average, the detail and variety of the individual is lost. For an area as diverse as Argyll and Bute, this poses some significant problems.

2.2 The experiences of the different groups and communities in Argyll and Bute are as diverse as the area’s landscape. The everyday life of someone
living on the Island of Colonsay, one of the 25 inhabited islands, is vastly different than an individual living in Helensburgh, the largest urban centre. The provision of services that may be taken for granted by urban residents, are a matter of serious trial for some rural communities. Conversely, the rural communities’ access to green space and the area’s outstanding biodiversity are the envy of many urban dwellers. Understanding these differences is the first step to understanding Argyll and Bute. It is these differences that make Argyll and Bute a unique and diverse council area.

- Argyll and Bute is the third most sparsely populated council area in Scotland. Population density is not uniform across the council area - the Commuter Belt in and around Helensburgh and Dunoon is almost ten times more densely populated than the Atlantic Islands.

- There are 198 settlements in Argyll and Bute. 80% of the population live in these settlements*

*An area with at least six household spaces.

- Approximately 45% of the total population live in one of the area’s five largest urban centres. The top five towns represent less than 2% of all settlements.

- 70% of all settlements have a population of fewer than 100 people and are home to 5% of the total population.

- One in five residents do not live in a settlement.

- Population has declined over the past ten years and this decline is projected to continue over the next ten, although at a slower rate than the rest of Scotland.

- Population decline in the 16-24 year-age band is outpacing the rate across the rest of Scotland. The rate is fastest in the Atlantic Islands, where many young people are forced to leave their communities to seek further education and/or employment.

- Argyll and Bute accounts for almost 10% of the total land in Scotland, but the total population accounts for fewer than 2% of the Scottish total. These factors contribute to make Argyll and Bute the third most sparsely populated council area in Scotland, with a population density of only 0.13 persons per hectare. See Diagram 1.
2.3 One of the most attractive aspects of Argyll and Bute is its diverse geography; a diversity that impacts on people and their lives, the services they enjoy and the social and economic fabric of their communities. Residents in urban centres such as Helensburgh or Dunoon face a different set of issues from those living in rural communities such as Clachan or Muasdale.

2.4 Argyll and Bute has 25 inhabited islands. Intuitively this group should represent a third dimension to the population. However, the term “island
population" is too broad. Not all islands are the same. The Isle of Seil, for example, is linked by bridge to the mainland; other inner islands are more easily accessible with strong mainland affinities; a very different dynamic than the four-hour ferry trip to Tiree or similar journeys to Jura for example. Bute presents another example. It has frequent ferry links to the mainland and residents regularly commute to Glasgow or other central belt towns for work. Clearly, not all islands are the same, and a generality like "island population" does not adequately differentiate the experiences of the different islands.

3 COMMUNITIES AND DEMOCRACY

3.1 Argyll and Bute’s 91,306 inhabitants live in 36 single member wards, which represent a diverse range of rural, island and urban environments. These distinct geographies have shaped a range of cultures and life circumstances that are as varied as the landscapes that separate them. These contrasts have a strong resonance when it comes to the task of defining electoral arrangements.

3.2 We welcome the Commission’s focus on communities; and share its desire that the present review should produce solutions that better recognizes perceived communities, that minimizes the need to split them, and which removes current anomalies. Fundamentally, we wish to see wards that are sustainable for many years to come, that electors and the public will be able to identify, and identify with, as part of the community of which they naturally feel part. We believe this will be an important ingredient if the electoral system post 2007 is to be understood, accepted and sustained by the public.

3.3 The Council’s approach to the concept of perceived communities is "bottom-up". As indicated earlier, these are diverse, and our approach has been to try to make sense of these, in an electoral context, at different levels of aggregation. It is inevitable that in the largest urban areas some division will be required when drawing ward boundaries. We believe the public will accept this. What they may less accept is the division of smaller communities if this can be avoided.

3.4 There are different indicators that help define "community". Physical geography is obvious, and is important in Argyll and Bute, and, equally, social and economic circumstances for different communities in different parts of the Council’s area. Boundaries for different purposes, of course, help define communities – current electoral boundaries, school catchments, planning areas, community council boundaries, civil parishes are all examples that reflect in varying ways, the evolution of communities, which in Argyll and Bute have significant historical and cultural dimensions.
Overlaying all of these is the sheer physical size of the Council’s area, with the consequence that Councillors, individually as community leaders, and the Council, have had to put in place democratic and service delivery arrangements that reflect and are responsive to meeting the needs of those diverse communities.

3.5 The Council’s approach to describing perceived communities for the purpose of the review begins at the narrowest focus and progressively widens to define communities at aggregate levels, built as follows-

3.4.1 Current polling district boundaries provide “a best fit” to reflect communities at the narrowest focus – these are shown as outlined on the accompanying Map 1.

3.4.2 The Council has just completed a review of its Community Councils Scheme following wide consultation with existing Community Councils. These revised boundaries represent an up to date understanding of communities at this slightly wider focus – these are shown coloured on Map 2.

3.4.3 Taking account of the foregoing and the Council’s local knowledge of the other indicators and considerations that help define an understanding of how, in the scale of Argyll and Bute, these individual communities aggregate cohesively, Map 3 depicts that aggregation. This is described in narrative in paragraph 3.6 below.

3.4.4 As noted in paragraph 3.4, the Council must respond (and has) to local communities at different levels. At the highest level of aggregation, the Council, at its inception in 1995/6, put in place democratic and service management and delivery arrangements that best reflect where people see themselves in Argyll and Bute at the highest and widest accepted notion of community. The Council is confident about this level of accepted community because it followed a wide public consultation exercise carried out at the time.

These highest level communities are –

- Mid Argyll and Kintyre, with Islay, Jura and Colonsay
- Oban and Lorn, with Mull, Tiree and Coll
- Bute and the Cowal peninsula
- Helensburgh and Lomond

and they are distinct and distinctive.
3.6 Aggregating Communities

3.6.1 Mid Argyll, Kintyre, Islay, Jura and Colonsay

Communities are perceived to aggregate as follows –

(1) Campbeltown; and the south and mid Kintyre villages to a line drawn from a point between Tayinloan and Clachan on the west of the peninsula to a point near Groiport on the east, and including the island of Gigha, all looking to Campbeltown for services

(2) Islay and Jura

(3) Colonsay

(4) Tarbert; and the area south to beyond Clachan on the west of the peninsula, south to near Groiport on the east, and northwest to include Kilberry, and north to include Erines, all looking to Tarbert for services

(5) Lochgilphead; and its hinterland including in a clockwise direction, Ardfern, Ford, Inveraray, Furnace, Minard, Ardrishaig, Ormsary, Tayvallich, looking to Lochgilphead for services

3.6.2 Oban, Lorn, Mull, Tiree and Coll

Communities are perceived to aggregate as follows –

(1) Tiree and Coll

(2) Mull

(3) North Lorn including Lismore, looking to Oban for services

(4) South Loch Etive villages (Dunbeg, Connel, Taynuilt), Awe, Dalmally, Glen Orchy, settlements on Loch Awe (both sides) down to north of Ford, all looking to Oban for services

(5) Oban urban; and the hinterland south to Arduane looking to Oban for services
3.6.3 **Bute and Cowal**

Communities are perceived to aggregate as follows –

(1) Bute

(2) Dunoon urban; and including Kirn, Hunters Quay, and west to include Innellan

(3) North and west Cowal – the area from Colintraive north to Cairndow, generally bounded by Loch Fyne to the west and Loch Striven to the south east, looking to Dunoon for services

(4) East Cowal – the area from the summit of the Rest and be Thankful and lying to the west of Loch Long south through Lochgoilhead continuing to Sandbank and the Holy Loch, all looking to Dunoon for services

There are distinctive geographical breaks between Bute and Cowal and Mid-Argyll at the head of Loch Fyne and with Lomond at the Rest and be Thankful.

3.6.4 **Helensburgh and Lomond**

Communities are perceived to aggregate as follows –

(1) Cardross

(2) Helensburgh urban; including, within it, Craigendorran, Colgrain, Kirkmichael, Churchhill, Clyde Arran, Glade

(3) Rhu, Shandon, Garelochhead, Rosneath Peninsula

(4) Arrochar, Tarbet and west Loch Lomond side south to Arden

4 **DATA**

4.1 Currently Argyll and Bute comprises 36 single member wards. It lies within the Commission's current Category 6 - a councillor/elector ratio of 1:2000. The July 2004 electorate figure is 67,972. The projection to 2009 is 70,146. We look forward to agreeing with the Commission the electorate projection to 2009 and the distribution of the data sets across Argyll and Bute.
4.2 We have given some preliminary thought to the size and shape of possible wards we consider will reflect perceived communities. The formulae –

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\begin{align*}
70,146/36 \times 3 &= 5846 \\
70,146/36 \times 4 &= 7794
\end{align*}
\]

produces the parity figures for 3 and 4 member wards respectively.

4.3 Utilising the total projected electorate and subject to detailed examination of its distribution, we think, at this stage, that it would be reasonable to consider electoral arrangements for Argyll and Bute that produces -

8x3 member wards = 46,768 electors = 24 councillors; and
3x4 member wards = 23,382 electors = 12 councillors
totalling 70,150 electors = 36 councillors

12 November 2004

Policy Development Group on Electoral Arrangements

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<td>Auchamore &amp; Inneilan (Dunoon)</td>
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<td>Councillor Robin Currie</td>
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