

BOUNDARY COMMISSION - REVIEW OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland is an independent, non-political body with responsibility for:
- Carrying out reviews of electoral wards for local authorities;
 - Carrying out reviews of the boundaries of local authority areas; and
 - Carrying out reviews of constituencies and regions for the Scottish Parliament.
- 1.2 The Commission has undertaken a review of the electoral arrangements for the Argyll and Bute Council area, which proposes 34 Councillors representing four 2-member wards, six 3-member wards and two 4-member wards, reducing overall Councillor numbers by two; and increasing the number of wards by one, from 11 to 12.
- 1.3 The legislation states that the Commission must first of all consult on proposals with Councils, as the statutory body, for a period of at least 2 months. This initial stage of the consultation process runs from 16th July until 30th September 2020.
- 1.4 To facilitate a response to the initial consultation, a members seminar was held on 10th August with the Boundary Commission, together with individual Area Committee sessions that were held on 11th, 12th and 17th August.
- 1.5 Having regard to the comments and feedback received at these consultation events, attached at appendix 1 is the proposed Council response to the initial proposals from the Boundary Commission, for consideration.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:-

- 2.1 Consider the proposed response to the Boundary Commission attached at appendix 1; and

2.2 Agree whether this forms the basis of the Council's response to the Boundary Commission by 30th September 2020 deadline.

3. DETAIL

Background

3.1 The Commission are tasked by the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to undertake reviews of local government electoral arrangements in Scotland every 8 to 12 years. Argyll and Bute Council area was last reviewed during the 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements, which reported in 2016. Scottish Ministers did not accept the Commission's 5th Review recommendations for Argyll and Bute due to concerns about the impact of the recommendations on local ties and preference at that time for maintenance of status quo.

3.2 A further review is now required under the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018. The Act recognises the importance of the Scottish Islands and the particular challenges they face. It offers additional flexibility to allow the Commission to recommend wards that elect 1 or 2 Councillors, as well as 3 or 4 Councillors, where such a ward contains an inhabited island. The Act requires the Boundary Commission to review the six Councils containing inhabited islands. Shetland, Orkney and Na h-Eileanan an Iar Councils were consulted during 2019, and Argyll and Bute, together with Highland and North Ayrshire Councils are being consulted with during the course of this year.

3.3 The Scottish Elections (Reform) Act, which has recently completed its passage through the Scottish Parliament, allows the Commission to recommend 2 and 5 member wards, in addition to 3 and 4 member wards, throughout Scotland. The Commission has considered the Act in determining their proposals.

Review Process

3.4 The number of Councillors for each Council is determined by placing it into a category with similar Councils. Argyll and Bute Council area is grouped with other more rural Council areas with below average levels of deprivation, according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) with a ratio of electors per Councillor of 2,800.

3.5 In recognition that a large change of Councillor numbers can be disruptive, the Commissioner's methodology incorporates a 10% change rule, meaning that they will not normally propose increasing or decreasing the total number of Councillors in a Council area by more than 10%.

3.6 In undertaking their review the Commission took account of the relevant legislation and:

- The interests of effective and convenient local government;
- Within each council, that each Councillor should represent the same number of electors as nearly as may be;

- Local ties which would be broken by making a particular boundary;
- The desirability of fixing boundaries that are easily identifiable; and
- Specific geographical considerations.

Proposals for wards in Argyll and Bute Council area

3.7 At its meeting held in April 2020 the Commission considered a report which set out 3 potential options with regard to ward designs for Argyll and Bute Council area –

Option 1 - Retains the existing electoral arrangements with 36 Councillors

Option 2 - Considers Island wards with 34 Councillors; and

Option 3 - Aims to minimise change to the existing ward boundaries with 33 Councillors.

3.8 The Commission have now advised that option 2 is being proposed - an electoral arrangement for 34 Councillors representing four 2-member wards, six 3-member wards and a two 4-member wards, reducing overall Councillor numbers by two; and increasing the number of wards by one, from 11 to 12.

3.9 A summary of key implications arising from Option 2 are:

- i. Makes no changes to the boundaries of five of the existing wards: Mid Argyll; Lomond North, Isle of Bute, Dunoon and Cowal.
- ii. Takes account of the Islands (Scotland) Act by using the flexibility offered by 2-member wards to better reflect local ties for Island communities. The proposals present a:
 - 2-member Isle of Bute ward, retaining the existing Isle of Bute ward boundary but reducing Councillor numbers by one;
 - 2-member Islay, Jura and Colonsay ward; and
 - 2-member Mull, Iona, Coll and Tiree ward.
- iii. The Island wards offer wide variation from electoral parity but as Islands they are less accessible than other areas within Argyll and Bute, therefore the Commission could consider special geographical circumstances in these wards.
- iv. Reduces representation in Helensburgh by one Councillor. It transfers approximately 900 electors from the existing Helensburgh Central ward to the Helensburgh and Lomond South ward. The proposed ward boundary follows historical ward boundaries from the Commission's 2nd and 3rd Reviews of Electoral Arrangements. As a consequence the Helensburgh Central ward becomes a 3-member ward, previously a 4-member ward.
- v. Proposes a 4-member Kintyre ward, covering the whole of Kintyre and including the Isle of Gigha.
- vi. Places Oban within a single 4-member ward to avoid breaking local community ties

3.10 Table 1 below illustrates the current electoral arrangement for Argyll and Bute and Table 2 details the proposed model, and actual/forecast variation from parity of the proposed wards.

Table 1 – Current Electoral Arrangements

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs
1	South Kintyre	3
2	Kintyre and the Islands	3
3	Mid Argyll	3
4	Oban South and the Isles	4
5	Oban North and Lorn	4
6	Cowal	3
7	Dunoon	3
8	Isle of Bute	3
9	Lomond North	3
10	Helensburgh Central	4
11	Helensburgh and Lomond South	3
Total		36

Table 2 – Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Variation from Electoral Parity (%)	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Electoral Parity (%)	Forecast Electors per Cllr
1	Kintyre	4	7,404	-5.7	7,222	-6.8	1,806
2	Islay, Jura and Colonsay	2	2,847	-27.5	2,927	-24.4	1,464
3	Mid Argyll	3	5,985	1.7	5,927	2.0	1,976
4	Mull, Iona, Coll and Tiree	2	3,211	-18.2	3,438	-11.2	1,719
5	Oban	4	8,357	6.5	8,497	9.7	2,124
6	Lorn	2	4,190	6.8	4,164	7.5	2,082
7	Cowal	3	5,734	-2.6	5,596	-3.7	1,865
8	Dunoon	3	5,500	-6.6	5,304	-8.7	1,768
9	Isle of Bute	2	4,696	19.6	4,406	13.8	2,203
10	Lomond North	3	6,000	1.9	5,858	0.8	1,953
11	Helensburgh Central	3	6,424	9.1	6,075	4.6	2,025
12	Helensburgh and Lomond South	3	6,377	8.3	6,420	10.5	2,140
Totals		34	66,725		65,834		

Consultation on Initial Proposals

- 3.12 The Council have been asked to consider the proposals from the Boundary Commission and agree the terms of an appropriate response. From an Officer point of view the proposals maintain the current four Area Committee areas, therefore from an administrative/governance perspective they do not create any issues. However, alteration of the ward boundaries is ultimately a political matter for consideration.
- 3.13 The legislation states that the Commission must first of all consult on proposals with Councils, as the statutory body, for a period of at least 2 months. This initial stage of the consultation process runs from 16th July until 30th September 2020. On the basis that the Council, as the statutory body, decides to submit views on the proposals, the Commission will consider these and then conduct the 2nd stage of the process in the form of a public consultation, which will commence in the autumn of 2020.
- 3.14 Following consideration of all the responses received, the Commission will then submit their final recommendations to Scottish Ministers by May 2021, in time for implementation for the next local government elections in May 2022.
- 3.15 In order to facilitate a response to the initial consultation, a member's seminar was held on 10th August, with the Boundary Commission in attendance, to allow members the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on their proposals. In addition to this Officers met with each Area Committee during w/c 11th and w/c 17th August to discuss the proposals for each area in more detail and to give members another opportunity to provide their views. Members were also encouraged to submit written comments via email. Summarised below is the key comments / issues that have been captured as part of the consultation events with members.

General points

- i. Following on from the 5th Review of Electoral Arrangements undertaken in 2016, which recommended a reduction of 3 Councillors, and was subsequently rejected by Scottish Ministers, it is disappointing to note that the Commission have again proposed a reduction in Councillor numbers by 2, diminishing overall electoral accountability within Argyll and Bute.
- ii. Broad agreement of the principles and methodology applied by the Commission in their determination of the proposals for Argyll and Bute;
- iii. Content that the four Area Committee areas have remained unchanged;
- iv. 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;

Ward specific points

v. Mid Argyll, Kintyre & the Islands

- Further proposal suggested which would see the boundary for the Kintyre ward stopping 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.
- View that the status quo should remain with regard to MAKI proposals as they do not appear to provide a positive outcome for the area.
- The proposals currently have Gigha as part of ward 1 – Kintyre, however, an alternative suggestion was that it should be considered in line with all other islands and form part of the proposed island ward for Islay, Jura and Colonsay.
- Proposed ward 2 – there was a division of opinion amongst members with regard to these proposals. On the one hand it was considered 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. This response noted it was advantageous to have councillor representation which covered both mainland and island areas to better represent the interests between island and mainland communities.

Conversely, there was a view that the creation of dedicated councillors for island communities is a positive step forward, recognising the importance of, and particular challenges that Islands face. 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.

vi. Bute & Cowal

- There was consensus from all members consulted that the proposal to decrease the number of councillors for Bute from 3 to 2 should be rejected. As an area of social and economic deprivation there is a requirement for additional representation and the proposals would be counter to this. In addition an argument can be made for 3 members bringing the number of electors into closer parity with those proposed for Ward 2 - Islay, Jura and Colonsay and Ward 4 - Mull Iona, Coll and Tiree.

vii. Helensburgh and Lomond

- With regard to the proposed reduction of one member within the Helensburgh Central ward there was a view that this reduction would result in Helensburgh and Lomond, as an administrative area, being under-represented in terms of electoral parity. It is projected that the Helensburgh and Lomond South ward electorate will increase in future years as a result of planned developments, which could result in this discrepancy becoming more marked (increase from 8.3% to 10.5% in variation from electoral parity).

viii. Oban, Lorn and the Isles

- View that while the proposals deal with a dedicated 2-member island ward covering Mull, Iona, Coll and Tiree, there are concerns that there may be strong views expressed by residents on the smaller islands (Seil, Lismore, Luing, Easdale and Kerrera) which are currently included within the two mainland wards. If the public consultation process indicates that there is a desire for these islands to form part of proposed ward 4, this would be supported.
- The proposals suggest that the Lorn ward would be covered by 2 members. An alternative suggestion is that this should be a 3 member ward, and that the proposed ward 5 - Oban should also be a 3 member ward, as opposed to the 4 members suggested. In line with the comments made for ward 9 – Bute, this would bring the number of electors into closer parity with those proposed for ward 2 - Islay, Jura and Colonsay and ward 4 - Mull Iona, Coll and Tiree.
- A further suggestion in respect of ward 6 is that it should be renamed to “North Lorn”, rather than the proposed “Lorn”. The Council would recommend that this alternative is included in the public consultation for consideration.

3.16 Appendix 1 sets out the proposed Council response to the Boundary Commission, which covers the key themes that emerged from the consultation process and provides the overall consensus, based on the majority of representations provided at the member’s seminar and the area committee sessions. Members are being asked to consider the terms of the proposed response and agree the final version to be submitted by 30th September 2020 deadline.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland has undertaken a review of the electoral arrangements for Argyll and Bute. Following a period of consultation with members, Appendix 1 sets out the terms of a proposed response to stage 1 of the consultation process, which runs until 30th September 2020.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – proposals take account of the Islands (Scotland) Act 201.
- 5.2 Financial – none arising from this report
- 5.3 Legal – Review undertaken in line with Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, Scottish Elections (Reform) Act, and the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.
- 5.4 HR – none arising from this report
- 5.5 Equalities/Fairer Scotland Duty/Islands – the Boundary Commission proposals have taken account of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018
- 5.6 Risk – none arising from this report
- 5.7 Customer Services – the Boundary Commission proposals consider enhanced local ties for Island communities / parity of constituent representation on Islands

6.0 APPENDICES

- 6.1 Appendix 1 – Proposed Stage 1 Consultation Response

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