

Historical Reviews of Electoral Arrangements

Background

1. The Commission asked the Secretariat to provide background information on how it conducted its more recent reviews of electoral arrangements, as it looks forward to undertaking its next reviews of electoral arrangements.
2. This paper considers the electoral reviews undertaken since the introduction of the current 32 council areas in Scotland. The Commission's approach to these reviews is summarised below.
3. The Commission will wish to consider this paper alongside Paper BS 184 Future Reviews of Electoral Arrangements.

Legislative requirements

4. The legislation which sets out the rules for electoral reviews is Part 2 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, see Section 13 and Schedule 6 of that Act - www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1973/65/section/13.
5. Section 13 sets out that reviews should be conducted with an overall aim of acting in the interests of effective and convenient local government.
6. Schedule 6 sets out more specific requirements, these are:
 - the number of electors per councillor in each ward shall be, as nearly as may be, the same;
 - subject to this, Boundaries Scotland shall have regard to:
 - the desirability of fixing boundaries that are easily identifiable with the first of these taking precedence over the second; and
 - local ties that would be broken by fixing a particular boundary;
 - If there is a conflict between these two criteria, greater weight is given to local ties
 - Boundaries Scotland may depart from the strict application of electoral parity to reflect special geographical considerations.
7. When recommending the number of electors per councillor in each ward, consideration must be given to the likely change in the number of electors in a council area over a 5 year period from the start of the Review.

Third Reviews of electoral arrangements

8. The Commission conducted its Third Reviews of electoral arrangements between 1996 and 1998. These recommended single-member wards and were in use from 1999 – 2007.
9. The Third Reviews methodology for determining councillor numbers categorised each council area with a ratio of councillors to electors based on:
 - large and small cities;
 - island authorities; and
 - population density (persons per hectare); and the proportion of the population in settlements of more than 10,000.

10. The Third Reviews methodology also determined that no council should have fewer than 18 or more than 80 members.

11. The table below and Appendix A provides a list of the Third Review's seven categories and how each council was categorised.

Third Reviews: Council categories and councillor: elector ratios		
Category	Description	Ratio
1	Large Cities (Edinburgh, Glasgow)	1:6,000
2	Cities (Aberdeen, Dundee)	1:4,000
3	Authorities with less than 60% of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons AND an overall population density of one person or more per hectare	1:3,500
4	Authorities with EITHER 60% or more of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons OR an overall population density of less than one person per hectare	1:3,000
5	Authorities with 60% or more of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons AND an overall population density of less than one person per hectare	1:2,500
6	Authorities with 60% or more of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons AND an overall population density of less than 0.2 persons per hectare	1:2,000
7	Island authorities (Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands)	1:750

12. Further information (reports and statutory instruments) on the Third Reviews is available on the Commission's website <https://boundaries.scot/reviews/Third-review-electoral-arrangements>.

Fourth Reviews of electoral arrangements

13. The Commission conducted its Fourth Reviews of electoral arrangements between 2004 and 2006. These recommended multi-member wards and were mainly in use from 2007 – 2017, and some continue to be in use today (Argyll and Bute, Dundee, Scottish Borders Council areas).

14. The Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 introduced proportional representation for local government elections and the Commission was required to review electoral arrangements for the May 2007 local government elections.

15. The Commission agreed not to alter the total number of councillors for any council. It simply combined the single-member wards into 3 or 4-member wards.

16. Further information (reports and statutory instruments) on the 4th Reviews is available on the Commission's website <https://boundaries.scot/reviews/fourth-statutory-reviews-electoral-arrangements>

Fifth Reviews of electoral arrangements

17. The Commission conducted its Fifth Reviews of electoral arrangements between 2014 and 2016. These wards, where adopted, were effective from 2017.

18. Prior to the Fifth Reviews, in 2010, the Commission consulted with Councils and other stakeholders on a number of factors regarding its forthcoming reviews of electoral arrangements. These included: should there be more or fewer councillors; a minimum or maximum number of councillors in each council area; methodology for determining councillor numbers; etc.
19. Scottish Ministers had indicated prior to the review that they would find it difficult to justify an increase in the overall number of councillors in Scotland as a result of the Fifth Reviews.
20. The Fifth Reviews methodology for councillor numbers used population distribution and Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) data. SIMD was introduced because it was considered that as the amount of deprivation across a council area increases, then the demands on a council or councillors increase.
21. There was a 10% limit on change of councillor numbers because a large change of councillor numbers in a council area could be disruptive. In a number of council areas the 10% rule was applied, notably in Highland and North Lanarkshire Council areas.
22. The methodology determined that no council should have fewer than 18 or more than 85 members. Without the limit on councillor numbers Clackmannanshire would have 12 councillors and Glasgow 166 councillors, subject to the 10% change rule.
23. The table below and Appendix B provides a list of the Fifth Review categories and how each council was categorised.

Fifth Reviews: Council categories and councillor : elector ratios		
Category	Criteria used to classify councils	Ratio
1	Less than 30% of the population living out-with settlements of 3,000 or more AND 30% or more of the population living in the most deprived areas	2,800
2	Less than 30% of the population living out-with settlements of 3,000 or more AND 15% or more and less than 30% of the population living in the most deprived areas	3,000
3	Less than 30% of the population living out-with settlements of 3,000 or more AND less than 15% of the population living in the most deprived areas	3,800
4	30% or more and less than 60% of the population living out-with settlements of 3,000 or more AND less than 15% of the population living in the most deprived areas	2,800
5	60% or more of the population living out-with settlements of 3,000 or more AND less than 15% of the population living in the most deprived areas	800

24. The Scottish Parliament did not implement the Commission's recommendations for Na h-Eileanan Siar, Orkney Islands or Shetland Islands Council areas due to the forthcoming Islands Bill.
25. The recommendations for Argyll and Bute, Dundee City and Scottish Borders Council areas were also not implemented. The Scottish Government news release (14 Sept. 2016) explaining their decision stated: "In a small number of cases –

Argyll and Bute, Dundee City and Scottish Borders - we have listened to local representations and left boundaries as they currently stand, to ensure that strong historic ties in particular areas and communities are maintained. Significant concerns were raised about aspects of the Commission's proposals for those areas, in particular that they would not reflect local communities. While the Commission did try to address these in its final recommendations, it was clear from the responses to those recommendations that many of those concerns remained. We therefore decided that the better course would be to keep the status quo for those areas." Link to Scottish Government quote <https://www.gov.scot/news/council-ward-boundaries-agreed/>

26. Further information on Fifth Reviews is available on the Commission's website <https://boundaries.scot/reviews/fifth-statutory-reviews-electoral-arrangements>

Islands Reviews of electoral arrangements

27. Following the introduction of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, the Commission was required to conduct electoral reviews for those councils with inhabited islands. These were: Argyll and Bute, Highland, North Ayrshire, Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands Council areas.

28. The Commission conducted its island reviews between 2018 and 2021. It applied the same methodology for determining councillor numbers as the Fifth Reviews.

29. The reviews were conducted in a phased approach, firstly the three solely island councils and then the three island-mainland councils. The phased approach was seen as the start of a rolling programme of electoral reviews rather than conducting a review of all 32 council areas at the same time.

30. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 offered the flexibility to recommend 1 or 2-member wards in wards with inhabited islands. The Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020 later allowed the use of 2 or 5-member wards across Scotland. The Commission applied the new legislation by recommending: a single-member Arran ward; two-member wards in four council areas; and five-member wards in North Ayrshire and Highland.

31. The Scottish Parliament Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee rejected the recommendations for Highland and Argyll and Bute Council areas because "both Highland and Argyll and Bute Councils made strong representations to the Committee they wished for the instruments to be rejected." Link to Scottish Parliament report: www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/local-gov/report-electoral-arrangements-regulations.pdf

32. Further information on the island reviews is available on the Commission's website <https://boundaries.scot/2019-reviews-electoral-arrangements>

Interim Reviews of Electoral Arrangements

33. Under section 16(3) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the Commission may review the electoral arrangements for a local government area.

34. In 2010 the Commission compared its Fourth Reviews 5-year forecast electorate for 2009, with the actual electorate figures at December 2009. As a result of this

analysis the Commission agreed to conduct eight interim reviews of electoral arrangements. One change was recommended for the Bathgate, West Lothian ward. It was amended from a 3-member to a 4-member ward. No ward boundaries were amended. The Fourth Reviews had used electorate data at July 2004.

35. In 2019 the Commission considered whether to conduct interim reviews of electoral arrangements based on analysis of the published 2018 ward electorate data. The Fifth Reviews had used electorate data at September 2013. The Commission noted changes in the levels of electoral disparity in some wards but these were mainly in areas with high student populations and the Commission agreed not to conduct any interim reviews at that time.

Summary

36. This paper provides a brief background on how the Commission has conducted its more recent reviews of electoral arrangements.

37. The Commission will wish to reflect on this paper as it considers its approach to its next reviews of electoral arrangements.

Secretariat
May 2025

Appendix A

Third Reviews - Methodology for determining councillor numbers

council area	existing councillor numbers (pre 1999)	Electorate (1996)	Persons per Hectare	% population of with Settlements of 10,000 Plus	Category	ratio (electors per councillor)	new councillor numbers (from 1999)
Aberdeen City	50	172,259	11.03	1.92	2	4,000	43
Aberdeenshire	47	170,653	0.34	84.70	5	2,500	68
Angus	26	86,220	0.49	43.80	4	3,000	29
Argyll and Bute	33	69,602	0.13	68.47	6	2,000	35
Clackmannanshire	12	31,256	3.04	46.07	3	3,500	18
Dumfries and Galloway	70	116,528	0.23	66.94	5	2,500	47
Dundee City	36	116,031	23.00	1.89	2	4,000	29
East Ayrshire	30	95,440	0.98	47.21	4	3,000	32
East Dunbartonshire	26	84,094	6.37	13.14	3	3,500	24
East Lothian	18	68,723	1.24	75.47	4	3,000	23
East Renfrewshire	20	66,162	4.94	13.84	3	3,500	20
City of Edinburgh	58	353,627	15.97	4.02	1	6,000	58
Falkirk	36	110,500	4.72	5.56	3	3,500	32
Fife	92	273,690	2.57	30.18	3	3,500	78
City of Glasgow	83	474,990	34.66	0.00	1	6,000	79
Highland	72	162,069	0.07	70.63	6	2,000	80
Inverclyde	20	69,160	5.57	9.60	3	3,500	20
Midlothian	15	61,167	2.22	14.27	3	3,500	18
Moray	18	65,640	0.37	77.24	5	2,500	26
Na h-Eileanan Siar	30	23,250	n/a	n/a	7	750	31
North Ayrshire	30	105,812	1.55	31.67	3	3,500	30
North Lanarkshire	69	246,386	6.84	9.93	3	3,500	70
Orkney Islands	28	15,681	n/a	n/a	7	750	21
Perth and Kinross	32	102,478	0.24	67.16	5	2,500	41
Renfrewshire	40	136,859	6.63	4.29	3	3,500	40
Shetland Islands	26	17,008	n/a	n/a	7	750	22
Scottish Borders	58	85,055	0.22	71.54	5	2,500	34
South Ayrshire	25	90,141	0.94	31.74	4	3,000	30
South Lanarkshire	74	235,373	1.69	21.22	3	3,500	67
Stirling	22	64,697	0.36	47.77	4	3,000	22
West Dunbartonshire	22	73,297	5.92	1.20	3	3,500	22
West Lothian	27	112,719	3.39	26.30	3	3,500	32
	1,245						1,221

Appendix B

Fifth Reviews - methodology for determining councillor numbers										
council area	existing councillor numbers	electorate (Sep 2013)	category	ratio (electors per councillor)	electorate divided by ratio		min (18) and max (85) limits applied	±10% change rule applied	new councillor numbers	change in councillor numbers
Aberdeen City	43	170,020	3	3,800	170,020 ÷ 3,800 =	45			45	2
Aberdeenshire	68	195,848	4	2,800	195,848 ÷ 2,800 =	70			70	2
Angus	29	87,228	3	3,800	87,228 ÷ 3,800 =	23		-2	27	-2
Argyll and Bute	36	67,846	4	2,800	67,846 ÷ 2,800 =	24		-3	33	-3
Clackmannanshire	18	37,154	2	3,000	37,154 ÷ 3,000 =	12	18		18	0
Dumfries and Galloway	47	115,696	4	2,800	115,696 ÷ 2,800 =	41		-4	43	-4
Dundee City	29	107,241	2	3,000	107,241 ÷ 3,000 =	36		2	31	2
East Ayrshire	32	95,479	2	3,000	95,479 ÷ 3,000 =	32			32	0
East Dunbartonshire	24	81,451	3	3,800	81,451 ÷ 3,800 =	21		-2	22	-2
East Lothian	23	77,639	3	3,800	77,639 ÷ 3,800 =	20		-2	21	-2
East Renfrewshire	20	69,322	3	3,800	69,322 ÷ 3,800 =	18			18	-2
Edinburgh, City of	58	345,401	3	3,800	345,401 ÷ 3,800 =	91		5	63	5
Eileanan an Iar, Na h-	31	21,989	5	800	21,989 ÷ 800 =	27		-3	28	-3
Falkirk	32	114,031	3	3,800	114,031 ÷ 3,800 =	30			30	-2
Fife	78	283,513	3	3,800	283,513 ÷ 3,800 =	75			75	-3
Glasgow City	79	464,193	1	2,800	464,193 ÷ 2,800 =	166	85		85	6
Highland	80	178,838	4	2,800	178,838 ÷ 2,800 =	64		-8	72	-8
Inverclyde	20	61,241	1	2,800	61,241 ÷ 2,800 =	22			22	2
Midlothian	18	64,728	3	3,800	64,728 ÷ 3,800 =	17	18		18	0
Moray	26	70,326	4	2,800	70,326 ÷ 2,800 =	25			25	-1
North Ayrshire	30	108,564	2	3,000	108,564 ÷ 3,000 =	36		3	33	3
North Lanarkshire	70	250,035	2	3,000	250,035 ÷ 3,000 =	83		7	77	7
Orkney Islands	21	16,830	5	800	16,830 ÷ 800 =	21			21	0
Perth and Kinross	41	111,905	4	2,800	111,905 ÷ 2,800 =	40			40	-1
Renfrewshire	40	130,443	2	3,000	130,443 ÷ 3,000 =	43			43	3
Scottish Borders	34	89,864	4	2,800	89,864 ÷ 2,800 =	32			32	-2
Shetland Islands	22	17,775	5	800	17,775 ÷ 800 =	22			22	0
South Ayrshire	30	89,843	3	3,800	89,843 ÷ 3,800 =	24		-3	27	-3
South Lanarkshire	67	243,155	3	3,800	243,155 ÷ 3,800 =	64			64	-3
Stirling	22	65,032	4	2,800	65,032 ÷ 2,800 =	23			23	1
West Dunbartonshire	22	67,321	2	3,000	67,321 ÷ 3,000 =	22			22	0
West Lothian	33	130,070	3	3,800	130,070 ÷ 3,800 =	34			34	1
	1,223								1,216	