

Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries Draft Provisional Proposals for Highland Council area

Action required

1. The Commission is invited to consider its Provisional Proposals for Highland council area for its Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries.

Background

2. The Commission considered provisional groupings of council areas as part of its approach to constituency design for the Second Review, which included a group of three constituencies contained wholly within Highland council area, see Paper BS 24. This paper offers four options for constituencies within this grouping.
3. The electorate quota for the Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries is 59,902 electors per constituency.
4. The rules for reviewing Scottish Parliament constituencies state:
 - **Rule 1**
 - So far as is practicable, regard must be had to the boundaries of the local government areas having effect from time to time under section 1 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994.
 - **Rule 2**
 - The electorate of a constituency must be as near the electoral quota as is practicable, having regard to Rule 1.
 - Boundaries Scotland may depart from the strict application of Rule 1 if it thinks that it is desirable to do so to avoid an excessive disparity between the electorate of a constituency and the electoral quota or between the electorate of a constituency and that of neighbouring constituencies.
 - **Rule 3**
 - Boundaries Scotland may depart from the strict application of Rules 1 and 2 if it thinks that special geographical considerations (including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency) render it desirable to do so.
 - **Rule 4**
 - Boundaries Scotland need not aim at giving full effect in all circumstances to Rules 1 to 3 but it must take account (so far as it reasonably can)—
 - (a) of the inconveniences attendant on alterations of constituencies other than alterations made for the purposes of Rule 1, and
 - (b) of any local ties which would be broken by such alterations.
5. The constituency entitlement for Highland Council area is as shown in the table below:

Council area	Electorate (1 Sept 22)	Constituency entitlement
Highland	189,218	3.2
Total	189,218	3.2

6. The electorates of the three existing Scottish Parliament constituencies within Highland Council area are shown in the table below:

Existing constituency	Electorate	Variation from electoral quota
Caithness, Sutherland and Ross	56,532	-5.6%
Inverness and Nairn	70,493	17.7%
Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch	62,193	3.8%

7. The existing Scottish Parliament boundaries have been in use since 2011.
8. Two of the existing constituencies are within 10% of the electoral quota and it is open to the Commission to leave them unchanged for the Second Review.
9. The constituency names in this paper are provisional. The Commission will have the opportunity to review all constituency names and designations prior to the publication of its Provisional Proposals.
10. A map of the existing constituencies in this grouping can be found at Appendix A.

Options

11. Four options are presented for consideration.

Option 1

12. Option 1 proposes to retain the three existing constituencies within Highland Council area.
13. The existing constituency boundaries follow ward boundaries in place at the time of the First Review, but the ward boundaries were altered following the 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements in 2017.

Proposed constituencies	Electorate	Variation from electoral quota	Wards
Caithness, Sutherland and Ross	56,532	-5.6%	1, 2, 3, 4, 5(part) 6, 7
Inverness and Nairn	70,493	17.7%	12(part), 13 - 19, 20(part)
Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch	62,193	3.8%	5(part), 8-11, 12(part), 20(part), 21

14. A map of Option 1 can be found at Appendix A.
15. The advantages of Option 1 are it:
 - retains the existing constituencies, which have been in place since 2011 and may avoid confusion for the local electorate;
 - avoids splitting Inverness between two constituencies; and
 - proposes two constituencies with variation from the electoral quota within 10%.
16. The disadvantages of Option 1 are it:
 - proposes an Inverness and Nairn constituency with variation from the electoral quota at nearly 18%; and
 - proposes two constituencies which cover large areas: Caithness, Sutherland and Ross; and Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch.

Option 2

17. Option 2 proposes a constituency design based on ward boundaries. Option 2 proposes three new constituencies that broadly consider the existing boundaries.

18. A map of Option 2 can be found at Appendix B.

Proposed constituencies	Electorate	Variation from electoral quota	Wards
Caithness, Sutherland and Ross	58,796	-1.8%	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Inverness and Nairn	65,433	9.2%	13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch	64,989	8.5%	8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 20, 21

19. The advantages of Option 2 are:

- it avoids splitting any wards;
- it avoids splitting Inverness between two constituencies; and
- all three constituencies are within 10% variation from the electoral quota.

20. The disadvantages of Option 2 are it:

- does not retain any of the existing constituencies;
- proposes two constituencies which cover large areas – Caithness, Sutherland and Ross, and Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch; and
- Skye sits in a different constituency to Kyle of Lochalsh, areas connected by the Skye bridge.

Option 3

21. Option 3 proposes three new constituencies.

22. Option 3 splits a single ward, Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh. It proposes a constituency similar to the existing Caithness, Sutherland and Ross but adds the Isle of Skye. The proposed boundary in the Strathcarron area is very similar to the existing boundary in this area but it deviates southwards towards Loch Alsh.

23. A map of Option 3 can be found at Appendix C.

Proposed constituencies	Electorate	Variation from electoral quota	Wards
Caithness, Sutherland Ross and Skye	66,788	11.5%	1-4,5(part),6,7,10
Inverness and Nairn	65,433	9.2%	13-19
Lochaber and Badenoch	56,997	-4.8%	5(part),8,9,11,12,20,21

24. The advantages of Option 3 are

- it broadly retains the existing Caithness, Sutherland and Ross constituency but with the addition of Skye; and
- Skye and Kyle of Lochalsh remain within the same constituency

25. The disadvantages of Option 3 are it:

- does not retain any of the existing constituencies;

- one constituency is out-with 10% variation from the electoral quota; and
- proposes a large Caithness, Sutherland Ross and Skye constituency.

Option 4

26. Option 4 is based on Scottish Parliament constituencies in use between 1999 and 2011 and splits Inverness between two constituencies to create two urban-rural constituencies. The existing constituencies have one Inverness city constituency and two large rural constituencies.

27. Option 4 retains the existing Caithness, Sutherland and Ross constituency.

28. A map of Option 4 can be found at Appendix D.

Proposed constituencies	Electorate	Variation from electoral quota	Wards
Caithness, Sutherland and Ross	56,532	-5.6%	1, 2, 3, 4, 5(part), 6, 7
Inverness East and Nairn	63,590	6.2%	12 (part), 14(part), 15-20
Ross, Skye and Inverness West	69,096	15.3%	5(part), 8 - 11, 12 (part), 13, 14(part), 21

29. The advantages of Option 4 are it:

- considers historical constituency boundaries which may be recognised by the local electorate. The initial Scottish Parliament constituency boundaries were the same as UK Parliament constituencies;
- retains the existing Caithness, Sutherland and Ross constituency;
- proposes only one large constituency - Caithness, Sutherland and Ross; and
- creates easily identifiable boundaries following Loch Ness and the River Ness in Inverness.

30. The disadvantages of Option 4 are it:

- may break local ties in Inverness; and
- proposes a Ross, Skye and Inverness constituency out-with 10% variation from the electoral quota.

Summary

31. All four options consider the Highland Council area boundary and retain three constituencies within Highland Council area, maintaining local ties within the area.

32. Option 1 retains all three of the existing constituencies, offering continuity with the existing boundaries. Options 2 and 3 propose three new constituencies. Option 4 retains the existing Caithness, Sutherland and Ross constituency.

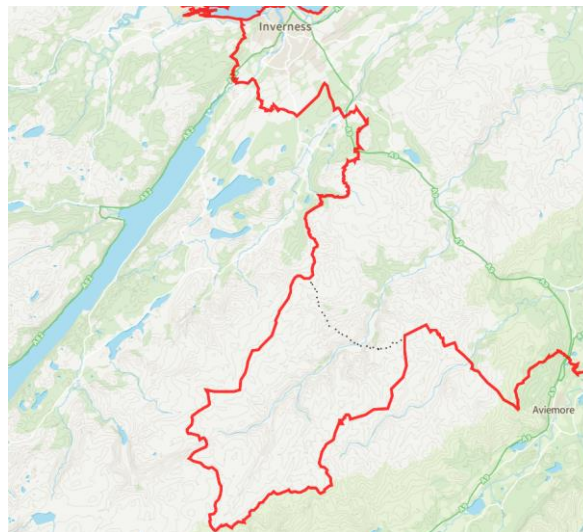
33. Option 2 proposes a constituency design based on ward boundaries and therefore does not split any wards. Option 1 splits three wards. Ward 5 is split by Lochcarron following the community council boundary in the area. Ward 12 is split south of Inverness as the boundary follows the old ward boundary in the area and ward 20 is split north of Aviemore. Option 3 splits a single ward, Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh is split by Lochcarron following community council boundaries in a way that creates a corridor for Skye and Kyle of Lochalsh to be placed in a single constituency to recognise their connectivity.

Option 4 splits three wards: Inverness Central ward by following the River Ness; Aird and Loch Ness ward by following Loch Ness and a historical ward boundary; and the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh ward that follows the existing constituency boundary.

34. Option 1 proposes one constituency out-with 10% variation from the electoral quota – Inverness and Nairn, although this is a predominantly urban constituency in comparison to the others proposed. Option 2 proposes no constituencies out-with 10% variation from the electoral quota and Option 3 proposes a single constituency out-with 10% variation from the electoral quota. Option 4 proposes one constituency out-with 10% variation from the electoral quota, although the boundary could be amended in Inverness to improve this. Highland Council area has an electorate of 189,218, with a constituency entitlement of 3.2 constituencies, therefore at least one constituency must have a slightly higher variation from the electorate quota.
35. Options 1, 2 and 3 retain links in Inverness. Option 4 divides Inverness between two constituencies by following the River Ness and the Loch Ness southwards, creating an easily identifiable constituency boundary. Option 4 follows historical UK Parliament and Scottish Parliament boundaries in Inverness. The electorate of the constituencies in use from 1999 to 2011 are shown in the table below for information.

Scottish Parliament Highland constituencies 1999–2011	Electorate	Variation from electoral quota
Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross	41,790	-30.2%
Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber	81,598	36.2%
Ross, Skye and Inverness West	65,830	9.9%

36. Options 1, 2 and 3 all include the Inverness South ward in an “Inverness” constituency, and this creates an oddly shaped boundary. There are few electors in Strathdearn, south of Tomatin and the Commission could create a more rounded shaped constituency by splitting the Inverness South ward and following the dotted line in the map below with little change to the proposed electorates.



37. All options contain large geographical areas – some of which are sparsely populated – and there may not be close ties between all communities within them but there may be some connectivity. For example, Ross-shire and Sutherland are both remote rural areas and are likely to have common issues.

Conclusion

38. The Commission is invited to agree its Provisional Proposals for public consultation, subject to satisfactory constituencies being designed in other groupings.

Secretariat
February 2023

