



# Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland

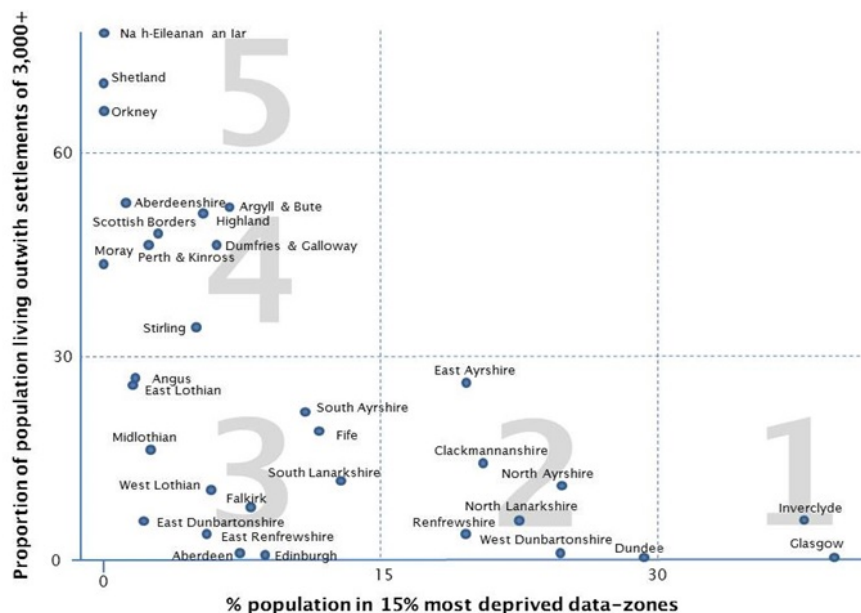
Thistle House, 91 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 5HD

Chair: Ronnie Hinds CPFA

Secretary: Isabel Drummond-Murray

## Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland Fifth Reviews of Electoral Arrangements Determining councillor numbers - October 2014

1. We are conducting our Fifth Reviews of Electoral Arrangements, which will result in us making recommendations to Scottish Ministers for the number of councillors in each of Scotland's 32 council areas, and for the boundaries of wards for the election of those councillors.
2. Scottish Ministers have indicated to us 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.
3. Between February and August 2014, we have carried out consultations with councils and the public on our initial proposals for councillor numbers, and this document summarises our views on councillor numbers in the light of those consultations.
4. When developing our initial proposals for councillor numbers, we have used a revised approach to categorising councils. Categorising councils is the first part of our methodology for determining councillor numbers for each council. The categorisation we have adopted for these reviews uses two factors to determine the category for each council:
  - population distribution, measured by the percentage of the population outside settlements of more than 3,000 people; and
  - deprivation, measured by the percentage of population in the 15% most deprived datazones in Scotland.
5. The resulting categories of council are shown in the figure below.



established by Parliament to advise Ministers on local government boundaries

phone: 0131 538 7510

email: [lgbc@scottishboundaries.gov.uk](mailto:lgbc@scottishboundaries.gov.uk)  
web: [www.lgbc-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.lgbc-scotland.gov.uk)

fax: 0131 538 7511

6. On the last occasion when we determined councillor numbers for each council (in 1996-98, as part of our Third Reviews), we categorised councils by population distribution and population density.
7. Having categorised councils, we determine our proposals for councillor numbers by:
  - calculating the number of electors in each council area;
  - applying a single ratio of councillors to electors to all councils in a category in order to treat similar councils in a consistent fashion;
  - applying a minimum limit to the number of councillors in order to ensure that each council has a sufficient number of councillors to allow it to conduct its duties;
  - applying a maximum limit to the number of councillors in order to ensure that no council is so large as to hamper effective administration; and
  - constraining the amount of change proposed for any council to no more than 10% of its current size in order to control the amount of disruption to councils.
8. The use of deprivation as a parameter in categorising councils has attracted significant comment in our consultations, including detailed correspondence from COSLA. COSLA has raised a number of concerns, including:
  - our use of deprivation as a factor for determining councillor numbers, rather than a comprehensive examination of the broad range of factors that impact on required levels of representation;
  - the relevance of deprivation is based on plausibility but is not proven by us;
  - increased levels of representation in some areas would result in decreased levels of representation in others.
9. Some councils challenge whether deprivation should be used as a factor to determine councillor numbers. They argue that there are other factors which have a greater impact on the need for councillor numbers. Other councils believe that high levels of deprivation do result in increased councillor workload.
10. We decided to include deprivation as a factor in our categorisation of councils after consideration of various options at our 4 meetings between October 2013 and January 2014. In doing so, we agreed that the previously used categorisation based on population distribution and density was an incomplete model of the demands on councillors. We also noted a lack of evidence supporting the sole use of population distribution and population density to determine the ratio of councillors to electors.
11. As the amount of deprivation across a council area increases, then the demands on a council increase. Increased councillor numbers will help with managing and responding to those demands:
  - increased councillor numbers provide greater corporate capacity within a council which can assist in addressing needs arising from deprivation which may not be fully expressed or understood; and
  - there is evidence that high levels of deprivation contribute to increased corporate councillor workload. In considering workload, we are aware that

this includes responsive work arising from contacts with local residents and also proactive work such as advocacy.

12. SIMD is used by Scottish Government as a policy tool, providing evidence to help target policies and funding where the aim is to wholly or partly tackle or take account of area concentrations of multiple deprivation.
13. Research by the Electoral Commission in 2005 demonstrates that across the United Kingdom there is a correlation between high levels of deprivation and low rates of electoral registration. Hence, increasing levels of representation (calculated by a ratio of councillors to electors) in areas of deprivation may result in a more consistent ratio of councillors to population across council areas in the same category.
14. We have concluded that there is a plausible argument that increasing councillor numbers in council areas which have high levels of deprivation will increase the capability of those councils to take action in response to the needs which that deprivation generates.
15. In 2000, the report of the Renewing Local Democracy Working Group ("the Kerley Report") considered the question of determining the number of councillors. It notes that there is no right answer to the question of how many councillors a council should have and comments on the sparsity of theoretical or empirical evidence to help decide this.
16. The Kerley Report also makes observations about the time commitment of councillors. From research conducted on its behalf, it estimates<sup>1</sup> that councillors in rural areas require around 7.5 hours travelling time per week compared to around half that in urban areas.
17. The findings of later research for the Scottish Government in 2005<sup>2</sup> found that:
  - there is little systematic variation in time spent by councillors on their role between urban, rural and mixed councils;
  - around 17% of the total time which councillors spent on the role was on travel to meetings;
  - the average time which councillors spend travelling to meetings is 10.1 hours per week for those in rural councils, and 7.4 hours per week for those in urban councils.This suggests that the rural nature of a council does affect workload, but by less than is implied by the current distribution of councillor numbers.
18. In our consideration of councillor numbers, and our consultation on councillor numbers in 2011, we noted that the challenges of covering rural areas are mitigated to a degree by the use of computer technology. We are also aware that other factors within a council's control, such as the system of governance within a council, can significantly affect the demands on councillor time.
19. We have continued to use population distribution as a factor in categorising councils to reflect these factors relating to rurality.

---

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Renewing Local Democracy Working Group, June 2000, paragraph 19. Available from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2000/06/6352/File-1>

<sup>2</sup> Survey of Scottish Councillors' Workload, September 2005, Hexagon Research and Consulting. Available from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/1070/0021747.pdf>

20. The evidence presented suggests that the methodology previously used to determine councillor numbers may be improved. By including population distribution and deprivation in council categorisation, we are seeking to balance the logistics of a councillor's role with recognition of the nature of the work, using deprivation as a measure of the latter.
21. There may be other measures of the complexity of councillors' work, other than deprivation and population distribution, but there does not appear to be agreement on what those other measures might be. We are commissioning research into the role and workload of councillors to provide further evidence on this issue for our future reviews.
22. As a result, using deprivation and population distribution appears to remain a reasonable model for us to adopt in discharging our statutory responsibility to make recommendations in the interests of effective and convenient local government.
23. We therefore confirm our approach to determining councillor numbers.
24. When we are designing wards for each council area, we will aim to design wards which result in the number of councillors arising from our methodology for determining councillor numbers. We will also take into account the views expressed to us during the consultations and the circumstances of each council area.
25. When we design wards, we aim to achieve electoral parity - the requirement in the legislation that the number of electors per councillors in each ward is as nearly as may be the same. If this aim, when applied to our proposed number of councillors, results in a significant degree of disruption to local ties across a council area, then we may also consider alternative ward designs for a different number of councillors.