

Islands Review 2018: councillor numbers methodology

Action Required

1. The Commission is invited to begin its consideration of the methodology for determining councillor numbers to be used in the forthcoming Islands Review.

Background

2. Under the legislation governing the Islands Review, the Commission can propose one or two member wards where those wards are wholly or mainly made up of inhabited islands. The question of overall councillor numbers within each council remains one at the Commission’s discretion and needs to be considered before designing a pattern of wards for each council area.
3. In 2011 the Commission conducted a consultation on how to determine its methodology for determining councillor numbers. The responses to the consultation generally indicated:
 - no widespread support for significant increase or decrease in councillor numbers;
 - support for a categorisation of councils to be used to set a ratio of electors to councillors for all councils in that category;
 - support for a reduction in the number of categories from the 7 used previously by the Commission;
 - suggestions of various factors to be used in a transparent methodology for categorising councils which share common characteristics; and
 - support for minimum and maximum council sizes.
4. During the 5th Reviews the Commission adopted a methodology which:
 - used measures of population distribution and deprivation to group councils into 5 categories (previously 7 had been used)
 - applied a range of ratios from 1:800 to 1:3,800 to the categories (1:750 to 1:6,000 had been used previously)
 - fixed a minimum number of 18 councillors and a maximum of 85 (previously 18 and 80)
 - applied a cap on change of councillor numbers in any council area of 10%.
5. The Commission’s 5th Reviews final recommendations considered special geographic circumstances and departed from strict electoral parity in some of the council areas containing islands.
6. The 5th Reviews methodology delivered the following councillor numbers for each of the 6 islands council areas:

5th Review categorisation

Council area	Category	Ratio	Councillor numbers (change from previous)	Note
Argyll and Bute	4	2800	33 (-3)	

Highland	4	2800	72 (-8)	10% cap on change applied as methodology suggested 64
North Ayrshire	2	3000	33 (+3)	10% cap on change applied as methodology suggested 36
Na h-Eileanan an Iar	5	800	28 (-3)	10% cap on change applied as methodology suggested 27
Orkney	5	800	21 (0)	
Shetland	5	800	22 (0)	

NB under the 5th Reviews the Commission's recommendations for Highland and North Ayrshire were accepted and came into effect May 2017.

Methodology Options

Retain 5th Reviews Methodology

9. Since the 5th Reviews reported, new SIMD data has been made available (2016). It would therefore be possible to revisit the categorisation of the councils and associated ratios. However, this would require re-examination of all 32 areas as the categorisation was based on the grouping of councils with similar characteristics and the relationship between these. It is suggested that the categorisation and ratios from the 5th Reviews are not looked at again for the purposes of the islands review. However, the existing categorisation and associated ratios could simply be retained for the 6 councils under review.
10. In the 5th reviews the Commission consulted councils formally on councillor numbers and during the consultation period met each council to discuss the methodology and approach to the review.
11. During the 5th Reviews the Commission moved away from the theoretical entitlement to councillor numbers in some council areas in order to better deliver a pattern of wards that achieved acceptable parity while respecting community ties. These areas included:
 - Highland - the Commission's final recommendation was for 74 councillors
 - Na h-Eileanan an Iar - the Commission's final recommendation was for 26 councillors
12. The Commission will wish to consider maintaining this flexibility of approach during the Islands Review, particularly as the use of one or two member wards may result in different challenges in terms of achieving acceptable parity and reflecting community ties.

LGBCS Methodology

13. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCS) undertake a programme of rolling reviews for councils.
14. LGBCS reviews are more varied and complex with regard to councillor numbers and types of councils such as Metropolitan, Boroughs or Unitary Authorities. They also have to consider different electoral arrangements, for example, some councils elect by thirds or halves. LGBCS have no set template for each review and ratios vary considerably, for example 1:79 - Scilly Isles or 1:7,000 - Birmingham. In England there is general trend towards reducing councillor numbers.
15. LGBCS no longer consult with the public on councillor numbers believing there was a general lack of understanding of how to establish how many councillors were needed and because it added little value.
16. LGBCS only consult with councils. They:
 - Ask councils to suggest a ratio for guidance.
 - Use CIPFA data to benchmark similar sized Councils
 - Look at council structure (strategic leadership, accountability, community leadership)
 - Can be flexible on councillor numbers to fit an area.
 - Require justification for a large change in council size.
17. CIPFA have an online comparison tool that groups council areas using socio/economic indicators. The tool is available here: <https://www.cipfastats.net/resources/nearestneighbours/profile.asp?view=select&dataset=scotland>
18. The CIPFA indicators differ from the SIMD indicators which include: geography, population, income, employment, health, education/ skills/ training, geographic access to services, crime and housing.

19. The CIPFA example below applies population and urban/ rural settlement indicators and shows how closely the 3 island council areas compare.

This report displays the nearest neighbours for **Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar** based on the selected indicators listed below and compared with:

- Unitary Authorities: Scotland
- Island Councils: Scotland

Pos.	Neighbour Authorities	Statistical Distance
1.	Shetland	0.0001
2.	Orkney	0.0002
3.	Moray	0.0223
4.	East Lothian	0.0253
5.	Scottish Borders	0.0365
6.	Argyll & Bute	0.0378
7.	Perth & Kinross	0.0543
8.	Dumfries & Galloway	0.0615
9.	Aberdeenshire	0.0868
10.	Stirling	0.0882
11.	Clackmannanshire	0.0885
12.	Highland	0.0914
13.	East Ayrshire	0.1017
14.	Angus	0.1089
15.	South Ayrshire	0.1554

- Population
- Urban / Rural settlement pattern 1991

20. The CIPFA example below applies some indicators similar to SIMD and this highlights how closely council areas from the 5th Reviews category 4 compare (Argyll & Bute, Dumfries & Galloway, Moray, Stirling, Highland, Perth & Kinross, Scottish Borders and Aberdeenshire).

This report displays the nearest neighbours for **Argyll & Bute** based on the selected indicators listed below and compared with:

- Unitary Authorities: Scotland

Pos.	Neighbour Authorities	Statistical Distance
1.	Angus	0.0211
2.	Dumfries & Galloway	0.0247
3.	Moray	0.0376
4.	Stirling	0.0384
5.	Highland	0.0421
6.	Perth & Kinross	0.0422
7.	Scottish Borders	0.0443
8.	South Ayrshire	0.0627
9.	Clackmannanshire	0.0767
10.	East Lothian	0.0768
11.	Aberdeenshire	0.0785
12.	East Ayrshire	0.1169
13.	Midlothian	0.1194
14.	North Ayrshire	0.1279
15.	West Lothian	0.1505
16.	Fife	0.1556
17.	Renfrewshire	0.1701
18.	Falkirk	0.1772
19.	East Renfrewshire	0.1816
20.	South Lanarkshire	0.188
21.	Inverclyde	0.2029
22.	City of Aberdeen	0.2096
23.	City of Dundee	0.2143
24.	East Dunbartonshire	0.2191
25.	West Dunbartonshire	0.2838
26.	City of Edinburgh	0.3881
27.	North Lanarkshire	0.4008
28.	City of Glasgow	1

- Population
- Secondary school pupils (% of total population)
- Income support per 1,000 aged < 65
- Urban / Rural settlement pattern 1991
- Limiting long-term illness - standardised index
- Pensioners on income support - standardised index

21. LGBCS ask councils for a 5 year forecast to help determine electorate change. They also invite councils to prepare initial ward designs.

Discussion

22. Adopting the same methodology used during the recently completed 5th Reviews would ensure continuity and avoid a further change of approach. The methodology could be re-run periodically using up-to-date SIMD and population data and allow continuation of a consistent Scotland-wide methodology even if moves are made towards a rolling review system.
23. There was some criticism of the methodology adopted for the 5th Reviews mainly focusing on use of SIMD data in the categorisation of councils. It appeared that SIMD became the focus for criticism when councils were unhappy with councillor numbers even though analysis shows it was not the principal driver where councillor numbers changed.
24. The methodology adopted for the 5th Reviews applied SIMD data (2012) based on the 15% most deprived datazones in Scotland. There are no such datazones in Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Orkney or Shetland council areas. The only datazones in the 15% most deprived datazones on an island within these six council areas are located in Rothesay in Argyll and Bute. There is criticism of SIMD for not picking up rural deprivation.
25. If the Commission adopts the same ratios used during the 5th Reviews this would result in broadly the same numbers of councillors being proposed for the 6 councils, due to a similar current electorate to 2013.
26. Responses to the stage 1 evidence gathering on the Bill have included suggestion that a separate ratio be adopted for the islands within a mainland council area to avoid consequential impacts on numbers in the mainland wards. This would require a more significant legislative change than is currently proposed by the Islands (Scotland) Bill as the principle of parity across a council area is embedded in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.
27. Adopting a more flexible approach, which would allow a council to make the case for the number of councillors it believes are required to deliver effective and convenient local government, is a departure from the more rigorous application of the methodology in the 5th Reviews, although as noted above some flexibility was also incorporated then. There may be an argument that such an approach will result in less control of overall councillor numbers across Scotland. However, it has always been the case the Commission conducts separate reviews in each council area rather than a single Scottish review.

Conclusion

28. On the basis of the information set out above the Commission may wish to consider an approach to determining councillor numbers which:
- Adopts as a baseline proposal the theoretical entitlement derived from using the 5th reviews methodology, with updated electorate data;
 - Requires councils to either agree the entitlement or propose an alternative which reflects effective and convenient local government within their areas. The Commission could issue guidance on what information it would require to support a case for an alternative;
 - Uses the agreed numbers as the basis for designing a pattern of wards;

- Gives initial consideration to how to incorporate flexibility into methodology to reflect intent of Islands Bill

29. The Commission is invited to:

- Note the information in this paper
- Discuss its general approach to the methodology to be used in the Islands Reviews
- Consider what further information it would like to inform next stages in development of its approach.

Secretariat

November 2017