

**LGBCS Paper 2472****2018 Review of Electoral Arrangements  
Na h–Eileanan an Iar council area****Purpose**

1. The Commission is invited to agree its Initial Proposals for the 2018 Review of Electoral Arrangements in Na h–Eileanan an Iar council area.

**Background**

2. At its meeting of 3 December the Commission considered Paper 2464 and four ward design options for Na h–Eileanan an Iar council area. The Commission asked the Secretariat to discuss the options with council officials, including the identification of suitable Gaelic names for wards. The four options included:
  - Option 1 – Commission’s recommendations from its 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews – 26 councillors;
  - Option 2 – ward design similar to 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews but with 1, 2, 3 or 4–member wards – 26 councillors;
  - Option 3 – ward design that addresses variation from parity in wards 1,2,3,4 and 5 – 28 councillors;
  - Option 4 – demonstrates the status quo and existing ward boundaries that have been in place since 2007 – 31 councillors.
3. During the 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews the Commission was flexible with overall councillor numbers in Na h–Eileanan an Iar council area. The Commission recommended 26 councillors which took into consideration local ties in the Lochs area and minimised changes to ward boundaries in Stornoway.

**Meeting with Council Officers**

4. The Secretariat met officers from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar on Tuesday 29 January 2019 to discuss informal views on proposed boundaries, the extent to which they take account of local ties, possible ward names and to seek advice on handling of the public consultation later in 2019. The Secretariat will provide an oral update from their visit at the Commission meeting.

**Options**

5. This paper sets out four options for the Commission to consider. Options 1 and 4 are unchanged from Paper 2464. Each of the options is considered in more detail below, but in summary:
  - Option 1 – Commission’s recommendations from its 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews – 26 councillors;
  - Option 2 – proposes a ward design with 1, 2, 3 or 4–member wards which considers local communities – 28 councillors;
  - Option 3 – very similar ward design to Option 2 but amends the ward boundaries by Stornoway, proposes 27 councillors;
  - Option 4 – demonstrates the status quo and existing ward boundaries that have been in place since 2007 – 31 councillors.

**Option 1 – Recommendations from 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews**

6. Option 1 adopts the Commission’s recommendations from its 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews.
7. The 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews recommended 26 Councillors and retained 3 ward boundaries; Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas; Beinn na Foghla agus Uibhist a Tuath; and Loch a Tuath. The 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews Report states the Commission

“agreed on an option which proposed 26 councillors, 2 less than our methodology proposed because it allowed us to contain the Lochs area within a single ward, re-instating local community ties in the area. The option also minimised changes to ward boundaries at Stornoway and would also be likely to be supported by respondents to the public consultation on councillor numbers as it reduced the number of councillors in the council area further than the 28 originally proposed by the Commission.”

8. The Commission’s 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews allowed for some variation from parity and three of the eight proposed wards had forecast electorate of over 10% however this was considered acceptable given special geographic circumstances.
9. During the 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews public consultation stage on councillor numbers, there were five responses which mainly opposed the proposals and sought a further reduction in councillor numbers. The Comhairle supported a reduction in councillor numbers.
10. During the 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews consultation on ward boundaries the Comhairle suggested some minor changes to the proposed boundaries by Stornoway. The main theme from the public consultation was a desire to retain 4 councillors in ward 1 (Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas) and for retaining the existing electoral arrangements. The Commission decided against retaining 4 councillors in ward 1 as the variation from parity would have been in excess of -20% and any consequential changes to improve this variation would have broken local ties elsewhere.
11. The electorates and associated variation from parity of the proposed wards for Option 1 are shown in the table below and the boundaries are shown in Appendices A & E:

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate	Variation from parity	Forecast Electorate	Forecast variation from parity
1	Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas	3	2,493	-0.3	2,372	-1.7
2	Beinn na Foghla agus Uibhist a Tuath	3	2,313	-7.5	2,202	-8.7
3	Na Hearadh, Sgìre nan Loch, Uig agus Beàrnaraigh	4	3,552	6.6	3,420	6.3
4	Sgìre an Rubha agus Sanndabhaig	3	2,438	-2.5	2,391	-0.9
5	Steòrnabhagh a Deas	3	2,605	4.2	2,702	12.0
6	Steòrnabhagh a Tuath	3	2,829	13.2	2,673	10.8
7	Loch a Tuath	3	2,180	-12.8	2,094	-13.2
8	Nis, An Taobh Siar agus Càrlabhagh	4	3,251	-2.4	3,056	-5.0
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>21,661</b>		<b>20,910</b>	

12. The advantages of Option 1 are:
  - it retains three of the existing wards thus retaining and respecting local ties; and
  - recognises local support for a reduction in councillor numbers from current levels.
13. The disadvantages of Option 1 are:

- proposes 26 councillors, two fewer than the Commissions methodology recommends;
- there was some opposition to this ward design during the 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews public consultation stage. This was mainly a desire to retain 4 councillors in the Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas ward; and
- forecast variation from parity is over 10% in two wards. One of the Stornoway wards offers forecast variation from parity of 12% but the ward covers a small area in comparison to other wards in the area.

### **Option 2 – 28 Councillors**

14. Option 2 offers a new ward design from Paper 2464.
15. Option 2 aims to address variation from parity with a ward design that uses 1, 2, 3 and 4–member wards. It aims to create a ward design based on local communities and island communities.
16. Option 2 proposes a 1–member Barra and Vatersay ward. Whilst Barra and Vatersay have over 900 electors and a variation from parity in excess of 15%, creating a 2–member Barra and Vatersay ward would mean over representation by an even greater amount.
17. Option 2 proposes a South Uist and Benbecula ward and a North Uist ward. The existing arrangements placed Benbecula within a North Uist ward however Benbecula has closer ties with South Uist. The new legislation makes it possible to recognise these close links.
18. Option 2 proposes a 2 member Harris ward by placing North and South Harris within a single ward. The proposed ward boundary follows the boundary between Lewis and Harris and enables the Commission to recognise the distinct community of Harris rather than placing Harris in a Harris and South Lewis ward as in previous reviews.
19. Option 2 proposes an alternative to the 4 member Lochs ward in south Lewis, as proposed in the 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews. This new option creates two 2–member wards in the west and east of south Lewis. The western ward includes communities around Uig in the south as well as Callanish, Breasclete and Carloway further north. Whilst forecast variation from parity is in excess of 10%, this ward and the proposed East Lochs ward, recognise local ties and the distinct geography of the area in an improved way and also ensure that representation is more manageable across a large area with relatively poor transport links.
20. Option 2 retains a Nis ward and a Loch a Tuath ward from the existing arrangements.
21. Option 2 proposes ward boundaries by Stornoway that follow existing ward boundaries to the west and centre of the town and the natural boundary of the Braighe causeway to the east, separates the town wards from the Rubha peninsula to recognise the distinct peninsula community.
22. The electorates and associated variation from parity of the proposed wards for Option 2 are shown in the table below and the boundaries are shown in Appendices B & F:

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate	Variation from parity	Forecast Electorate	Forecast Variation from parity
1	Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh	1	972	25.6	931	24.7
2	Uibhist a Deas agus Beinn na Foghla	3	2,491	7.3	2,361	5.4
3	Uibhist a Tuath / North Uist	2	1,346	-13.0	1,285	-14.0
4	Na Hearadh	2	1,524	-1.5	1,482	-0.8
5	East Lochs	2	1,447	-6.5	1,380	-7.6
6	Uig Cala Nais Breasclete etc	2	1,299	-16.0	1,232	-17.5
7	Nis	3	2,524	8.8	2,373	5.9
8	Loch a Tuath	3	2,256	-2.8	2,175	-2.9
9	Steòrnabhagh a Tuath (North)	4	2,959	-4.4	2,997	0.3
10	Steòrnabhagh a Deas (South)	4	3,182	2.8	3,130	4.8
11	Sgìre an Rubha	2	1,661	7.4	1,564	4.7
		<b>28</b>	<b>21,661</b>		<b>20,910</b>	

23. The advantages of Option 2 are:

- considers local community ties throughout the area;
- proposes 28 councillors, the same as the Commissions methodology recommends;
- considers existing ward boundaries in many areas; and
- improves parity in the wards to the north of the council area in comparison to the 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews and the existing arrangements in particular.

24. The disadvantages of Option 2 are:

- forecast variation from parity is over 10% in three wards. Special geographical circumstances could be considered in these wards due to their remoteness and poor transport links.

### Option 3 – 27 Councillors

25. Option 3 is very similar in design to Option 2. It follows similar ward boundaries in Barra, Uist, Harris and Lewis, with the exception of Stornoway, to propose a ward design with 27 councillors.

26. In Stornoway, Option 2 proposes minor changes in the centre of the town in order to ensure that variation from parity is kept as close to 10% as possible. The Commission may consider that under-representation in the town of Stornoway is acceptable given the relative small area of the town and that Option 2 offers better variation from parity in other more rural areas.

27. The electorates and associated variation from parity of the proposed wards for Option 3 are shown in the table below and the boundaries are shown in Appendices C & G:

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate	Variation from parity	Forecast Electorate	Forecast Variation from parity
1	Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh	1	972	21.2	931	20.2
2	Uibhist a Deas agus Beinn na Foghla	3	2,491	3.5	2,361	1.6
3	Uibhist a Tuath / North Uist	2	1,346	-16.1	1,285	-17.0
4	Na Hearadh	2	1,524	-5.0	1,482	-4.3
5	Uig Cala Nais Breasclete etc	2	1,370	-14.6	1,388	-10.4
6	East Lochs	2	1,456	-9.3	1,299	-16.1
7	Nis	3	2,450	1.8	2,303	-0.9

8	Loch a Tuath	3	2,295	-4.6	2,202	-5.2
9	Steòrnabhadh a Tuath (North)	3	2,458	2.1	2,541	9.4
10	Steòrnabhadh a Deas (South)	4	3,638	13.4	3,554	14.7
11	Sgìre an Rubha	2	1,661	3.5	1,564	1.0
		<b>27</b>	<b>21,661</b>		<b>20,910</b>	

28. The advantages of Option 3 are:

- considers local community ties throughout the area;
- considers existing ward boundaries where possible; and
- proposes 27 councillors, one fewer than the Commissions methodology recommends. However during the 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews consultations there was a desire to further reduce the number of councillors in the area.

29. The disadvantages of Option 3 are:

- forecast variation from parity is over 10% in four wards. Special geographical circumstances could be considered in these wards due to their remoteness and poor transport links.

#### Option 4 – 31 Councillors – Existing Wards

30. Option 4 retains the existing electoral arrangements. It makes no changes to the existing ward boundaries or number of councillors.

31. The electorates and associated variation from parity for Option 4 are shown in the table below and the boundaries are shown in Appendices D & H:

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate	Variation from parity	Forecast Electorate	Forecast Variation from parity
1	Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas	4	2,493	-10.8	2,372	-12.1
2	Beinn na Foghla agus Uibhist a Tuath	3	2,316	10.5	2,205	9.0
3	Na Hearadh agus Ceann a Deas nan Loch	3	1,865	-11.0	1,803	-10.9
4	Sgìr' Uige agus Ceann a Tuath nan Loch	3	2,407	14.8	2,294	13.3
5	Sgìre an Rubha	3	1,869	-10.8	1,760	-13.0
6	Steòrnabhadh a Deas	4	2,972	6.3	3,142	16.5
7	Steòrnabhadh a Tuath	4	2,959	5.9	2,787	3.3
8	Loch a Tuath	3	2,256	7.6	2,175	7.5
9	An Taobh Siar agus Nis	4	2,524	-9.7	2,373	-12.1
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>21,661</b>		<b>20,910</b>	

32. The advantages of Option 4 are:

- it maintains the existing electoral arrangements and may avoid confusion by retaining identifiable ward boundaries; and
- minimises disruption.

33. The disadvantages of Option 4 are:

- it proposes 3 more councillors than the methodology recommends;
- forecast variation from parity is over 10% in six wards; and
- may not fully consider local ties in island communities as it fails to make use of the availability of 1 and 2 member wards.

## Conclusions

34. Only options 2 and 3 consider the use of 1, 2, 3 and 4-member wards as enabled by the legislation.
35. All four options have at least two wards with variation from parity over 10%. Option 4 contains five wards with variation from parity over 10%. The Commission can consider special geographical circumstances due to the remoteness of the area and its island communities with poor transport links, dependent on weather conditions.
36. The Commission can consider flexibility with variation from electoral parity. The Commission's Fourth Reviews of Electoral Arrangements recommended two wards with variation from parity of -13%. The Third Reviews of Electoral Arrangements recommended a Uig ward with variation from parity over 20%.
37. The Commission's methodology for councillor numbers recommends 28 councillors for Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area. During the 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews the Commission also recommended 28 councillors but during ward design further reduced councillor numbers to 26. During the public consultation on the 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews there was some public support for a further reduction of councillor numbers. Option 1 proposes 26 councillors, a figure supported by the Comhairle and public during the 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews. Option 2 proposes 28 councillors. Option 3 proposes 27 councillors a reduction from the Commission's methodology, while considering local ties. Option 4 proposes 31 councillors.
38. Options 2 and 3 make significant changes to the existing ward boundaries but aim to better reflect local ties throughout the area. Options 2 and 3 also aim to better reflect island communities and the common geography that defines them.
39. Options 1, 2, 3 and 4 each provide ward designs with at least two wards with  $\pm 10\%$  forecast variation from parity but all options can consider the special geographical circumstances of the area.
40. During the 5<sup>th</sup> Reviews concerns were raised particularly from the Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist ward that they wished to retain a 4 member ward and that most respondents preferred retention of existing arrangements. As an example of the remoteness in the area and challenges faced by councillors in the Islands there is no direct flight from Barra to Stornoway so elected members from Barra generally use video-conference facilities to attend meetings. Alternatively they can drive 140 miles (6 hours) to Stornoway via 2 ferries. Or they also have the option to drive to Benbecula and fly from there to Stornoway.
41. The Secretariat will liaise with the Council prior to its consultation to confirm the appropriate Gaelic names for each ward if that differs from those already proposed by the Commission.

## Recommendations

42. The Commission is invited to provisionally agree its Initial Proposals for the 2018 Review of Electoral Arrangements in Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area.

## Secretariat

**February 2018**