

2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements for Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire Council areas – ward design approach

Purpose

1. The Commission is invited to consider the ward design options it wishes to consider and general principles in developing its Initial Proposals for the 2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements for Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire Council areas and note the timescales for these reviews. This will assist the Secretariat in preparing a range of options for the Commission’s future consideration.

Background

2. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 allows the Commission to create 1 or 2 member wards where a ward wholly or partly contains an inhabited island as well as 3 or 4 member wards. For the three island councils this allowed the use of 1 or 2 member wards across the council area. For the mainland–island councils the use of 1 or 2 member wards is confined only to the inhabited islands they contain.
3. The Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill, introduced to Parliament in September 2019 and expected to complete its passage by Spring/Summer 2020, will, if passed un–amended, offer the Commission the opportunity to design 2 and 5–member wards across the whole of Scotland.
4. When developing its initial proposals for the 2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements for Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and Na h–Eileanan an Iar Council areas the Commission considered the following options as standard:
 - Option 1 – recommendations from the 5th Reviews (only 3 and 4–member wards)
 - Options 2 and 3 – ward designs with 1, 2, 3 and 4–member wards
 - Option 4 – the existing electoral arrangements (only 3 and 4–member wards)
5. The Commission’s proposals for its public consultation in the three island council areas contain mainly 3 and 4–member wards.
6. Concern from councils about using single member wards has focussed on the ability of a single councillor to manage the workload required; the likelihood of someone standing for election; and the benefits of multi–member wards for the effectiveness of representation and conduct of council business.
7. The table below shows the ward design patterns consulted on for the three island council areas.

Council area – consultation stage	1–member wards	2–member wards	3–member wards	4–member wards
Shetland Islands – council consultation	1	2	2	3
Shetland Islands – public consultation		4	1	3
Orkney Islands – council and public consultation			3	3
Na h–Eileanan an Iar – council and public consultation	1	5	3	2

Discussion

8. The flexibility offered by the new legislation allows the Commission to create numerous different options for ward designs compared to the options available using only 3 or 4 member wards. In order to ensure the Secretariat prepares options that are considered theoretically acceptable by the Commission it would be helpful to know whether there are standard options the Commission would like to be presented.
9. There is some value in presenting an option based on the existing electoral arrangements which would take as its starting point a pattern of 3 and 4 member wards only. For Highland and North Ayrshire Council areas both the existing electoral arrangements and 5th Reviews recommendations are the same.
10. The Commission may not wish to agree a standard approach for these three councils because they are so diverse. The geography of the three areas differs widely, for example approximately 16% of the Argyll and Bute electorate live on islands but only 5% of the electorate live on islands in North Ayrshire and Highland Council areas. North Ayrshire is an urban area with good transport links while Highland is the largest council area in Scotland that contains remote areas such as Sutherland with poorer transport links.
11. The Commission may wish to maintain a target of 10% variation from electoral parity but consider special geographical conditions in island and other remote areas. The Commission recommended variation from electoral parity of 24% (Barra), -27% (Orkney North Isles) and -13% (Shetland North Isles) for its public consultation in the three island council areas.
12. The Commission may want to minimise change with 3 or 4-member wards remaining the norm, as the “default” number across Scotland as a whole, and that it looks for defined circumstances in which it departs from the norm. Such circumstances might include where an island has a clear community or communities or challenging transport links to other areas which would need to be incorporated within a 3 or 4 member ward.
13. The Commission may not wish to agree its approach until after it has met with all three Councils. The Commission meets Argyll and Bute and Highland Councils in October 2019. It meets North Ayrshire Council in December 2019.

Schedule of reviews

14. The Commission is invited to note an expected schedule for the 2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements for Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire Council areas.
15. The passage of the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill may impact on timing of the consultations for these reviews. The Bill is expected to be enacted in Spring 2020 but no firm timescales have been set for this.
16. The other factor which could alter the schedule is the need to consult on revised proposals.

Schedule of 2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements for Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire Council areas	
Date (approx)	Activity
Oct – Dec 2019	Pre-consultation – meet 3 councils
Nov 2019 – Jan 2020	Develop ward proposals
Jan 2020	Commission meets to discuss options
Jan – Feb 2020	Discuss ward proposals informally with Councils Preparation for council consultation
Feb 2020	Commission meets to agree initial proposals
Mar – May 2020	Council consultation on wards *
Jun – Jul 2020	Consideration of council responses
May – Jul 2020	Preparation for public consultation
Aug – Nov 2020	Public consultation on wards*
Dec 2020 – Jan 2021	Consider responses
	<i>Commission may undertake further consultation on revised proposals</i>
Feb – Mar 2021	Prepare Final Report
Apr – May 2021	Preparation for publication
May-21	Submit Final Report
<i>* depends on progress of Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill with use of 2 and 5-member wards</i>	

Conclusion

17. The Secretariat invites the Commission to consider its general ward design approach when considering its Initial Proposals for the 2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements for Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire Council areas and note the schedule for these reviews.
18. The Commission is invited to consider its general principles in developing its Initial Proposals for the 2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements for Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire Council areas

**Secretariat
 October 2019**