

**2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements
Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area**

Purpose

1. The Commission is invited to consider responses to the public consultation on its Initial Proposals for the 2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements in Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area and agree if it wishes to undertake further consultation before agreeing its Final Recommendations.

Electoral Arrangements at the start of this review

2. At the start of this review, Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area was represented by 31 councillors in five 3-member wards and four 4-member wards.
3. The electorates and associated variation from parity for the existing electoral arrangements are shown in the table below and the boundaries are shown in Appendix A.

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2017)	Variation from Parity (%)	Forecast Electorate (2023)	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	Sgir' 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	Steòrnabhagh a Deas	4	2,972	6.3	3,142	16.5
7	Steòrnabhagh 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
		31	21,661		20,910	

Initial Proposals – Consultation with Councils

4. The Commission agreed to adopt its methodology from its 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements for this review. The 5th Reviews' methodology placed Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands council areas in the same category with a ratio of electors per councillor of 800:1.
5. The methodology recommended 27 councillors for Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area ($21,661 \div 800 = 27$). As there was a 10% cap on change in councillor numbers, the Commission therefore proposed 28 councillors, three fewer than at present.
6. The existing electoral arrangements in Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area offered variation from electoral parity of over 10% in five wards.
7. The Initial Proposals presented an electoral arrangement for 28 councillors representing one 1-member ward, five 2-member wards, three 3-member wards and two 4-member wards, reducing councillor numbers by 3. They:

- improved overall forecast variation from electoral parity – three wards have forecast variation from parity of over 10% compared to six wards at present;
 - retained three existing ward boundaries (An Taobh Siar agus Nis, Steòrnabhagh a Tuath and Loch a Tuath) but otherwise made changes throughout the council area to better reflect local communities;
 - took account of the Islands (Scotland) Act by using the flexibility offered by 1–member and 2–member wards to better reflect local ties;
 - proposed ward boundaries that follow historical or easily identifiable boundaries; and
 - considered local ties in the whole council area.
8. The electorates and associated variation from parity for the Initial Proposals – council consultation are shown in the table above and the boundaries are shown in Appendix B.

Ward no.	Ward name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 17)	Current Variation from Parity (%)	Forecast Electorate (2023)	Forecast Variation from Parity (%)
1	Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh	1	972	25.6	931	24.7
2	Uibhist a Deas, Èirisgeigh agus Beinn na Faoghla	3	2,491	7.3	2,361	5.4
3	Uibhist a Tuath	2	1,346	-13.0	1,285	-14.0
4	Na Hearadh	2	1,524	-1.5	1,482	-0.8
5	Sgìre nan Loch	2	1,447	-6.5	1,380	-7.6
6	Sgìr' Ùige agus Carlabhagh	2	1,299	-16.0	1,232	-17.5
7	An Taobh Siar agus 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	4	2,959	-4.4	2,997	0.3
10	Steòrnabhagh a Deas	4	3,182	2.8	3,130	4.8
11	Sgìre an Rubha	2	1,661	7.4	1,564	4.7
		28	21,661		20,910	

9. The Commission consulted on its Initial Proposals with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar for a 2–month period from 20 March to 20 May 2019.

Initial Proposals – Public Consultation

10. The Commission considered the response received on its Initial Proposals from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar at its meeting of 17 June 2019.
11. The Commission noted that the Comhairle supported the Initial Proposals, but made suggestions for minor changes to ward boundaries by Stornoway.
12. The Commission agreed to adopt the Comhairle's suggested amendments to include the areas of Arnish / Marybank and Newmarket within the Initial Proposals' Steòrnabhagh a Tuath ward. These areas lie on the edge of Stornoway, and the Commission accepted that local ties would be better reflected by including them in a Stornoway ward. These changes could be accommodated without causing the forecast variation from parity of the affected

wards to exceed 10%. The Comhairle had made similar suggestions to amend ward boundaries in these areas during the 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements which the Commission adopted and recommended.

13. The Initial Proposals – Public Consultation presented an electoral arrangement for 28 councillors representing one 1-member ward, five 2-member wards, three 3-member wards and two 4-member wards. The proposals:

- retained one existing ward boundary – An Taobh Siar agus Nis ward;
- retained a further four ward names: Loch a Tuath; Steòrnabhagh a Tuath; Steòrnabhagh a Deas; and Sgìre an Rubha;
- took account of the Islands (Scotland) Act by using the flexibility offered by 1-member and 2-member wards to better reflect local ties. There is a 1-member Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh ward. This ward has a wide variation from electoral parity but a 2-member Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh ward would have a wider variation from parity. There are also 2-member wards in North Uist, Lewis, Harris, the Lochs and Eye Peninsula; and
- aimed to better reflect local communities, follow historical or easily identifiable boundaries, consider special geographic circumstances in rural, sparsely populated areas with limited transport links, and consider local ties in the whole council area.

14. The electorates and associated variation from parity for the Initial Proposals – public consultation are shown in the table below and the boundaries are shown in Appendix C.

Ward no.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 17)	Current Variation from Parity (%)	Forecast Electorate (2023)	Forecast Variation from Parity (%)
1	Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh	1	972	25.6	931	24.7
2	Uibhist a Deas, Èirisgeigh agus Beinn na Faoghla	3	2,491	7.3	2,361	5.4
3	Uibhist a Tuath	2	1,346	-13.0	1,285	-14.0
4	Na Hearadh	2	1,524	-1.5	1,482	-0.8
5	Sgìre nan Loch	2	1,436	-7.2	1,353	-9.4
6	Sgìr' Ùige agus Carlabhagh	2	1,299	-16.0	1,232	-17.5
7	An Taobh Siar agus Nis	3	2,524	8.8	2,373	5.9
8	Loch a Tuath	3	2,180	-6.1	2,094	-6.5
9	Steòrnabhagh a Tuath	4	3,046	-1.6	3,105	3.9
10	Steòrnabhagh a Deas	4	3,182	2.8	3,130	4.8
11	Sgìre an Rubha	2	1,661	7.4	1,564	4.7
		28	21,661		20,910	

15. The Commission's public consultation on its Initial Proposals with Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area ran for a 12-week period from 10 September to 2 December 2019.

16. During the public consultation the Commission: issued a news release; placed a 4-page newspaper cover wrap in the Stornoway Gazette; placed posters and further information regarding the review in over 60 display points (such as airport terminals, schools, council offices, libraries, health centres and places of worship); and paid for social media advertising. The materials encouraged those interested to respond to the consultation via the Commission's consultation site.

Responses to Initial Proposals – Public Consultation

17. 63 responses were received during the public consultation, see Annex for responses submitted via the consultation site. Responses submitted by email or post have been printed for information as well. All responses will be available on the Commission's website or consultation site at a later date if permission was granted for publication.
18. The Commission received 61 responses via its consultation site and two by email.
19. Nearly half of all responses supported the Commission's proposals to reduce councillor numbers and to redraw ward boundaries. Half the respondents opposed the proposed reduction in councillor numbers and also the proposed ward boundaries. A large number of respondents cited a desire for greater representation in the southern isles and less councillors representing Stornoway.
20. 17 out of a total of 63 responses supported the Commission's proposals for both councillor numbers and ward boundaries.

Councillor Numbers

21. The Comhairle advised that they support the Commission's proposals for councillor numbers.
22. 28 out of 63 responses to the public consultation supported the proposed reduction in councillor numbers. However 4 of those called for a greater reduction in councillor numbers (CNES6,8,24,28).
23. The main reason given in support of a reduction was cost savings, which was cited by 9 respondents (CNES1,4,5,12,15,22,30,35,46). Other reasons in support of the proposed reduction in councillor numbers were:
 - opposition to a single member Barra ward (CNES38);
 - over-representation in the council area, particularly in Stornoway (CNES9);
 - a belief the councillors don't do anything (CNES29);
 - too many wards with badly thought out boundaries (CNES37); and
 - agreement that a 2 member ward focused on Harris would best represent the community there (CNES55).
24. Whilst agreeing with the proposed reduction two respondents (CNES19 and 20) suggested that the reduction should be more focussed on Lewis and Stornoway in particular. The respondents suggested that Stornoway was over-represented and that rural island communities would benefit from greater representation whilst the more urban areas were easier to represent.
25. Councillors Manford and Macmillan made a submission in which they agreed with the Commission's proposals for councillor numbers but they offered an alternative suggestion for ward boundaries and the number of councillors representing those wards (CNES63).
26. 6 respondents offered no comment in support of their representations (CNES3,26,34,50,51,61).

27. 35 respondents opposed the proposed reduction in councillor numbers.
28. Councillor Paul Steele who represents the existing Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eiriosgaigh agus Uibhist a Deas ward made a submission in which he opposed the proposed single member Barra ward. Councillor Steele suggested that the single councillor would have to attend all 6 of the Comhairle's standing committees in order to effectively represent their ward. The councillor went on to suggest that using current population to decide on overall councillor numbers was unfair in areas where the population was increasing (CNES46).
29. Whilst opposing the proposed reduction in councillor numbers, 7 respondents called for a greater reduction in councillors than that proposed by the Commission (CNES7,10,11,18,23,42,43).
30. A member of the public made an alternative suggestion based on 20 councillors with boundaries based on those defined by the Integration Joint Board (CNES7).
31. 9 of the respondents who disagreed with the proposed reduction in councillors cited opposition to a reduction in democratic representation as a factor (CNES21,25,27,31,32,36,40,41). This included a response from lochdar Community Council (CNES,44).
32. Two members of the public suggested an additional councillor for the proposed 3-member Uibhist a Deas, Èirisgeigh agus Beinn na Faoghla ward as there are five community councils in the area (CNES36,41).
33. Other reasons given in support of opposition to the proposed reduction in councillor numbers were:
- a need for greater diversity (CNES14);
 - population on Uist is growing (CNES16); and
 - North Uist requires its own voice (CNES17).
34. A member of the public called for an increase in councillor numbers based on the difficulty posed in effectively representing a single member ward on all Council committees (CNES2).
35. A member of the public stated that "The optimum number of councillors would be preferable" (CNES33).
36. 7 responses opposed a reduction in councillors as they believed that any reduction would diminish representation in rural areas rather than centres of population such as Stornoway (CNES47,48,51,55,56,58,59).

Councillor Numbers – alternative suggestions

37. A member of the public made an alternative suggestion based on 20 councillors. The Commission's methodology proposes 28 councillors for Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area, a reduction of 3 from the existing 31 councillors. The Commission applies a 10% cap on change in councillor numbers to limit disruption and clearly a reduction to 20 councillors would be a substantial departure from the Commission's methodology and also potentially disruptive to the delivery of effective and convenient local government in the council area (CNES7).

38. Two members of the public suggested an additional councillor for the proposed 3-member Uibhist a Deas, Èirisgeigh agus Beinn na Faoghla ward. This would lead to the ward varying from parity by -16.6% rather than 7.3% as in the Commission's proposals. It would also necessitate an increase in councillor numbers as opposed to the 28 proposed by the Commission's proposals (CNES36,41).
39. A single ward in Stornoway with approximately 6,200 electors would require 8 councillors to remain within 10% of parity, which is outwith the Commission's remit (CNES29).

Ward Boundaries

40. The Comhairle advised that they supported the Commission's proposals and were appreciative that the Commission adopted its suggestions to make minor amendments to the boundary of the proposed Steòrnabhagh a Tuath ward following its consultation with the Comhairle.
41. 29 out of 63 responses to the public consultation supported the proposed ward boundaries. However 2 of those in support called for a greater reduction in the number of wards (CNES5,8).
42. There were a range of reasons for supporting the Commission's proposals; however 12 respondents offered no comment to accompany their declarations of support (CNES 9,10,12,14,15,16,24,28,34,37,42,59).
43. A member of the public commented that the proposed wards reflected population change (CNES4).
44. A member of the public called for a reduction of councillors in the proposed Loch a Tuath ward and suggested that other wards could have their councillor numbers reduced (CNES6).
45. A member of the public agreed with overall pattern of wards (CNES7).
46. A member of the public agreed with changes to the proposed Uig ward in particular (CNES26).
47. A member of the public agreed with the proposals but commented that they had some difficulty understanding the accompanying maps (CNES27).
48. A member of the public agreed with the proposals and suggested Harris should be a single ward (CNES30).
49. Two members of the public agreed with the proposals on the grounds that they better reflected and linked the existing communities than the current arrangements (CNES35,47).
50. A member of the public suggested that Eriskay, South Uist and Benbecula ward should be represented by four members rather than the proposed three (CNES36).
51. A member of the public agreed that Barra should have a single dedicated representative (CNES41).

52. A representative of South Harris Community Council commented that they agreed with a reduction in the overall number of councillors and wards, but suggested a 2-member Harris ward to better represent the views of the people of Harris (CNES54).
53. A member of the public commented that they approve of the proposal to split Uig, Bernera and West from the Lochs (CNES61).
54. 31 out of 63 responses to the public consultation disagreed with the proposed ward boundaries.
55. Four respondents offered no comment in support of their disagreement with the Commission's proposals (CNES17,49,52,56).
56. Two responses suggested retaining the existing ward arrangements (CNES50,57)
57. A member of the public was concerned that the proposals would result in wards that were too large in terms of geographical area (CNES31).
58. A member of the public called a reduction in wards to support their suggested reduction in councillors and a single councillor per main island group and 2 councillors for Stornoway (CNES43).

Southern Isles

59. A member of the public opposed a reduction in wards to the south of the Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area. The respondent suggested a 2-member ward for Barra and Vatersay, a 3-member ward for South Uist and Eriskay and a 3 member ward for North Uist and Benbecula. With no changes elsewhere in the council area this would offer 30 councillors across 11 wards and both the Barra and South Uist and Eriskay wards would be overrepresented at close to -30% variation from parity (CNES2).
60. A member of the public opposed Barra and Vatersay being a single member ward. Their preference was for the status quo of a larger ward with 4 councillors. The respondent suggested that this arrangement would lead to a bigger pool of experience and knowledge to draw upon and would be more conducive to working together. The respondent went on to say that many of the issues in Barra and Vatersay are similar to the ones in Uist (CNES13).
61. A member of the public opposed the proposals on the grounds that "South Uist only gets 2 councillors but is 2nd largest island". The respondent suggested that ward arrangements generally favour centres of population in Lewis rather than the southern isles (CNES 19).
62. A member of the public suggested a 2-member North Uist ward, a 2-member Benbecula ward, a 3-member South Uist ward and a single member Barra and Vatersay ward (CNES20).
63. For the above suggestion without further reorganisation and boundary changes elsewhere this would lead to the wards suggested above having variation from parity figures of -6.6%, -35.5%, -29.5% and 34.9% respectively. This would be a

significant departure from parity, in comparison to the Commission's proposals (CNES20).

64. A member of the public suggested that given the size of the southern isles area and the needs of the population, the councillors and wards should be retained as they are (CNES21).
65. A member of the public suggested that there are far too many wards and that several could be combined such as Barra and South Uist (CNES23).
66. A member of the public opposed the proposed Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh ward and wishes to retain the existing 4-member Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas ward because multi-member wards offer "unbiased representation" (CNES38).
67. A member of the public suggested retaining the existing 4-member Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas ward as these areas have common issues. They also suggested a 2-member Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh ward (CNES40).
68. Iochdar Community Council suggested a 4-member Eriskay, South Uist and Benbecula ward as they believed that this would better represent the area as its population continues to grow (CNES44).
69. For the above suggestion the proposed ward 2's forecast variation from parity would change from 5.4% to -18.1% and parity in other wards would be adversely affected in order to accommodate an additional councillor (CNES44).
70. Councillor Paul Steele who represents the existing Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eiriosgaigh agus Uibhist a Deas ward suggest a 2-member Barra ward would allow more effective representation on the island. Councillor Steele also suggested a 3-member North Uist and Benbecula ward, a 3-member South Uist and Eriskay ward and 6-member Stornoway ward (CNES46).
71. For the above suggestion Councillor Steele suggested a 6 member Stornoway ward to accommodate these suggestions. Legislation does not currently allow for a six member ward but in order to accommodate the suggested changes elsewhere in the council area but two 3-member Stornoway wards could be created however these would have forecast variation from parity figures of 33% (CNES46).
72. A member of the public suggested that South Uist and Eriskay be paired together due to their long historical connection. They also suggested Benbecula and North Uist be paired together (CNES53).
73. Whilst the suggestion above offers acceptable parity in the wards suggested (if South Uist and Eriskay is a 2 member and Benbecula and North Uist a 3 member ward) it is very similar to the existing arrangements with the exception of a separate Barra ward and offers a total of 28 councillors (CNES53).
74. A member of the public suggested that North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist and Barra should be separate wards and that Eriskay should be included as South Uist (CNES58).

75. The above suggestion (CNES58) would result in a total of 29 councillors. Forecast variation from parity in these wards would be as follows:
- Barra – 29%;
 - South Uist and Eriskay – 4%;
 - Benbecula – –40%; and
 - North Uist – –11%.
76. Councillor Manford and Councillor Macmillan (CNES62) who both represent the existing Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas ward made a joint submission. They submitted an alternative suggestion which they believed meets all the requirements of the Schedule 6 rules from the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. They supported the proposed Barra ward boundary because Barra has its own historical identity but opposed a single-member representing it. They believed the proposed Barra ward should be a 2-member ward. They advised the proposed Barra ward offers the largest under-representation of all the proposed wards in the council area but it is also the most remote island 150 miles from the Comhairle headquarters in Stornoway.
77. They noted that Uist has historically been seen as a single island and this is reflected today with a single secondary school, council office, hospital and other amenities covering the main islands of South Uist, Benbecula and North Uist. They suggested that Uist should be a single ward with six elected members. They noted that Uist is also a remote island area from the council headquarters in Stornoway.
78. They suggested that to retain a total of 28 councillors for the council area, the Commission could consider a single 6-member Stornoway ward instead of the proposed two 4-member Stornoway wards. They reasoned that reducing councillor numbers in Stornoway is acceptable because the electorate raise common issues and the main council offices are located in Stornoway.
79. They further reasoned that both the UK and Scottish Parliament Na h-Eileanan an Iar constituencies are allowed wide variation from electoral parity from other constituencies in the country because of the geography of the area and distance to travel to both Parliaments. They believed the Commission should consider a similar approach for local government.
80. They wished both Barra and Uist residents to have more representation so that the Comhairle is more aware and considers the issues facing more remote island communities in the south of the council area.
81. In their submission Councillors Manford and Macmillan suggested a 2-member Barra ward and 6-member wards for Uist and Stornoway. A 2-member Barra ward would offer variation from electoral parity of –37% based on 28 councillors. The Commission cannot consider 6-member wards because this is out-with the legislative framework for this review. However the Commission could consider two 3-member wards in Uist and Stornoway. If both the Uist and Stornoway electorate were divided equally it would offer variation from electoral parity of approximately –17% in each Uist ward and +34% in each Stornoway ward. Legislation preserves both the Scottish and UK Parliament constituency of Na h-Eileanan an Iar. There is currently no legislation to preserve a local government ward (CNES63).

82. A member of the public disagreed with the overall pattern of wards proposed by the Commission, but supported a single member ward for Barra and Vatersay (CNES32).
83. A member of the public disagreed with the proposals on the grounds that Barra is a unique island with its own culture and way of being and should be represented as the individuals they are and that South Uist problems are not Barra problems (CNES25).

Further reduction in councillors

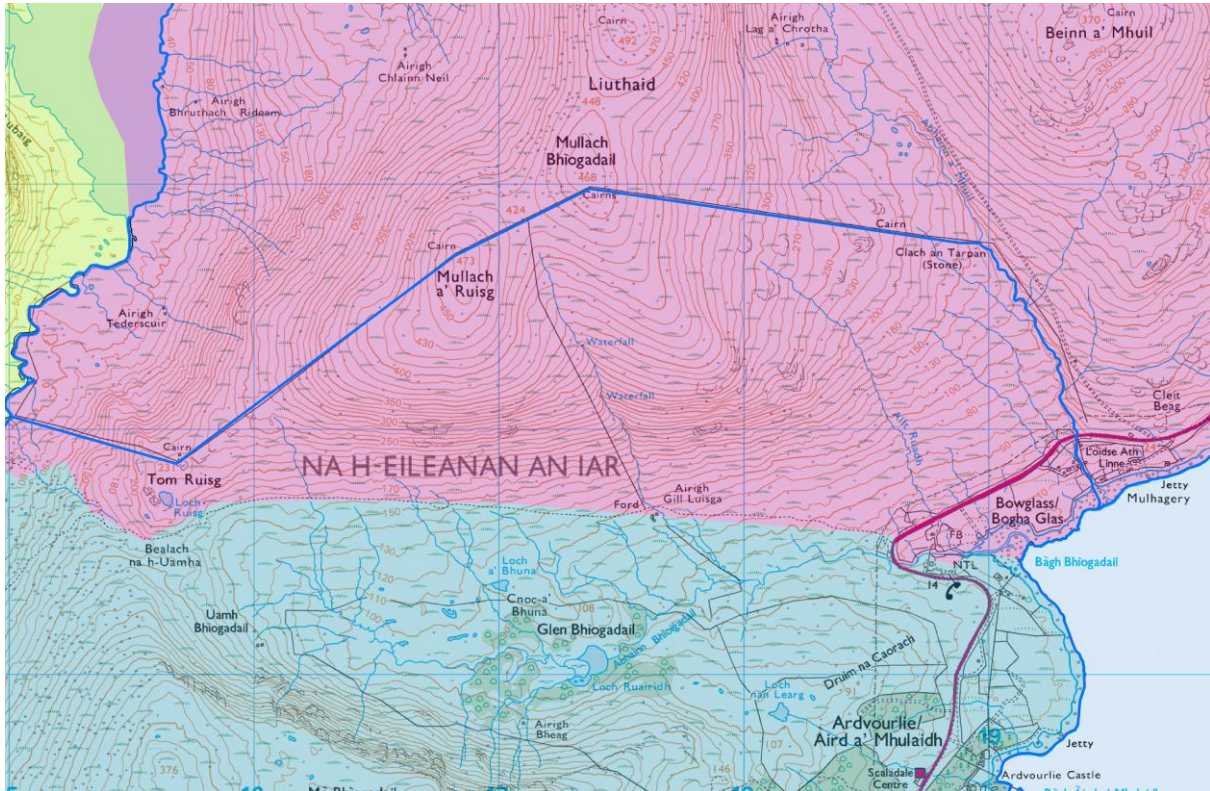
84. A member of the public called for fewer councillors in the wards proposed (CNES11) whilst another respondent suggested fewer wards than that proposed by the Commission (CNES18) but neither respondent offered alternative suggestions.

Reduction in Stornoway's representation

85. A member of the public suggested that the loss of 3 rural councillors further skews the power towards Stornoway. The respondent suggests that this is already a problem, and the proposals makes it worse. The respondent also states that those in the southern isles, and the rural north, get a very bad deal from the council (CNES1).
86. A member of the public suggested that the ward boundaries in support of an overall reduction in councillors would reduce "the proper representation of vulnerable rural areas" (CNES48).
87. A member of the public suggested that rural areas need more representation and should retain all their councillors. They went on to claim that Stornoway has most of the expenditure anyway and is, therefore, where any councillor reduction should be made. (CNES50)

Harris – Lewis boundary

88. A member of the public advised that the Commission's ward boundary proposals in Harris do not follow the historical Harris – Lewis boundary. They advise that the Harris – Lewis boundary follows two streams: Abhainn a Mhuill and Abhainn Bhioigadail (CNES3).
89. The Harris – Lewis boundary has historically been disputed and the Secretariat suggest discussing the proposed boundary in this area with the Comhairle. The Commission's proposals follow the current community council boundary between North Harris – Kinloch. The suggestion to follow the streams as a boundary would move the hamlet of Bowglass with five properties from Harris to a Lewis ward. The public consultation proposals are shown below in block colours and the suggested alternative is a blue line (CNES3).



Ward Names

90. No alternative ward names were suggested during the public consultation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

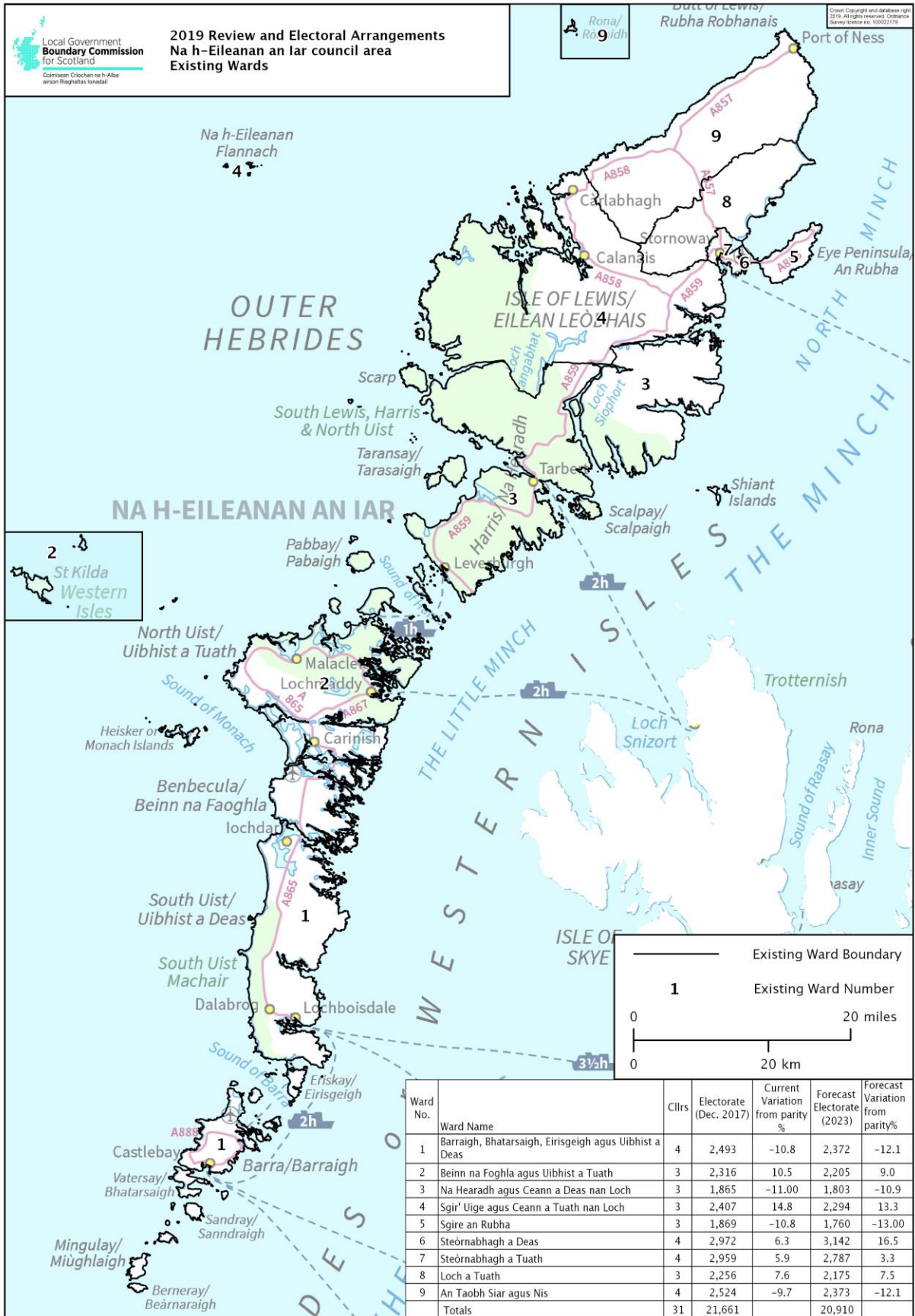
91. The Secretariat has not developed alternative suggestions for the initial analysis of responses to the Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area consultation but the Commission may wish alternative suggestions developed for its next meeting.

92. Taking into account all of the evidence arising from the public consultation, the Secretariat invites the Commission to decide for Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area whether:

- to adopt without amendment the Initial Proposals as its Final Recommendations, (see Appendix C); or
- to make amendments to its Initial Proposals, either councillor numbers or ward boundaries; and
- to consult on revised proposals.

Secretariat
December 2019

Appendix A – Existing wards



Appendix C
Initial Proposals – Public Consultation

