

LGBCS Paper 2520**2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements
Highland council area****Purpose**

1. The Commission is invited to give preliminary consideration to its Initial Proposals for the 2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements in Highland council area.

Background

2. The Commission agreed to adopt the same methodology from its 5th Reviews for its 2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements. The 5th Reviews methodology placed Highland council area as a Category 4 council area with ratio of electors per councillor of 2,800:1.
3. The methodology at the time of the 5th Reviews recommended 64 councillors but this was revised to 72 once the 10% cap on change had been applied for Highland council area. The 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements recommended a ward design with 74 councillors, representing 10 3-member wards and 11 4-member wards, decreasing the number of wards in the area by 1 and reducing the number of councillors by 6. The Commission recommended 74 councillors for Highland council area because they recognised special geographic circumstances in Eilean a' Cheò, Caithness and Sutherland while retaining local ties as far as possible, improving overall electoral parity and considering the need to reduce councillor numbers.
4. At its meeting of October 2019, the Commission considered Paper 2502: "2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements for Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire Council areas – methodology for determining councillor numbers". The Commission considered whether to propose electoral arrangements using councillor numbers from the 5th Reviews or using councillor numbers based on the 5th Reviews methodology with updated electorate and using the existing number of councillors as the starting point. The Commission asked for designs based on a range of options.
5. The Commission may wish to:
 - retain 74 councillors;
 - re-apply its methodology from the 5th Reviews for councillor numbers and recommend 72 councillors;
 - apply the methodology to the existing number of councillors which would recommend 66 councillors. However with a 10% cap on change, this would result in a total of 67 councillors; or
 - be flexible with councillor numbers when considering its ward design options and following feedback from its consultations.
6. The 5 year forecast electorate in Highland shows an increase from 183,541 in 2018 to 185,943 in 2024. The forecast electorate is based on all expected housing developments being completed and occupied within a 5-year period. The Commission's recent analysis of interim reviews showed a number of wards in Inverness and surrounding areas exceeded the forecast electorate from 2013.
7. The Commission met officials and councillors from Highland Council in October 2019 to discuss the approach to the review and in particular the new flexibility

offered by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 to use 1 or 2–member wards. At that meeting, Highland Council were open to 2 and 5–member wards offering welcome flexibility which it was felt might be useful in Caithness and Sutherland and Inverness.

8. There are 11 inhabited islands within the council area according to NRS data. Skye or Eilean a' Chèò with 8,579 electors is the largest with only Raasay among the other islands exceeding 100 electors (158).

Options

9. This paper sets out five options for the Commission to consider:
 - Option 1 retains the existing arrangement of 74 councillors which has been in place since the 5th Reviews;
 - Option 2a proposes an arrangement with 72 councillors as recommended by the Commission's methodology from the 5th Reviews. It aims to retain as many wards as possible and address large variations from parity where possible;
 - Option 2b proposes a similar arrangement to Option 2a but with a slightly different ward design with further proposed changes near Inverness and a 3–member Eilean a' Chèò ward;
 - Option 3 proposes a more radical arrangement for 68 councillors and makes a number of changes to ward boundaries near Dingwall and Inverness; and
 - Option 4 proposes a further alternative arrangement for 69 councillors across 21 wards with changes similar to those in Option 4.
10. Options 1, 2a, 2b and 3 propose 3 and 4–member wards. Option 4 proposes 2, 3, 4 and 5–member wards.
11. Each of these options is considered in more detail below.

Option 1 – Recommendations from 5th Reviews/ Existing wards

12. Option 1 retains the existing electoral arrangements, which have been in place since the completion of the 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements and came in to effect in May 2017.
13. The 5th Reviews recommended an electoral arrangement for 74 councillors, representing 10 3–member wards and 11 4–member wards, reducing the number of wards in the area by 1 and reducing councillor numbers by 6.
14. During the 5th Reviews public consultation stage there were 33 responses. The main theme to emerge was opposition to the proposals in Caithness that reduced the number of wards in the area by 1 and reduced the number of councillors in the area by 2.
15. Option 1 considers the recognised county boundaries of Caithness, Nairn and Sutherland.
16. 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 Appendix A:

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Variation from parity	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast variation from parity
1	North, West and Central Sutherland	3	4,833	-35.0%	4,578	-39.3%
2	Thurso and Northwest Caithness	4	10,083	1.6%	9,543	-5.1%
3	Wick and East Caithness	4	9,815	-1.1%	9,389	-6.6%
4	East Sutherland and Edderton	3	6,263	-15.8%	6,183	-18.0%
5	Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	4	9,895	-0.3%	9,441	-6.1%
6	Cromarty Firth	4	9,643	-2.8%	9,529	-5.2%
7	Tain and Easter Ross	3	7,050	-5.3%	6,758	-10.4%
8	Dingwall and Seaforth	4	10,063	1.4%	10,490	4.4%
9	Black Isle	3	8,503	14.3%	8,314	10.3%
10	Eilean a' Chèò	4	8,579	-13.5%	8,299	-17.4%
11	Caol and Mallaig	3	7,003	-5.9%	7,150	-5.1%
12	Aird and Loch Ness	4	9,716	-2.1%	9,585	-4.6%
13	Inverness West	3	8,178	9.9%	8,526	13.1%
14	Inverness Central	3	8,641	16.1%	8,224	9.1%
15	Inverness Ness-side	3	8,151	9.5%	9,257	22.8%
16	Inverness Millburn	3	7,634	2.6%	7,494	-0.6%
17	Culloden and Ardersier	3	8,240	10.7%	11,297	49.9%
18	Nairn and Cawdor	4	10,425	5.1%	10,047	0.0%
19	Inverness South	4	11,543	16.4%	11,962	19.0%
20	Badenoch and Strathspey	4	10,637	7.2%	11,310	12.5%
21	Fort William and Ardnamurchan	4	8,646	-12.9%	8,567	-14.8%
		74	183,541		185,943	

17. The advantages of Option 1 are:

- it retains existing ward boundaries that have been in place since May 2017 minimising change and offering recognisable ward boundaries.

18. The disadvantages of Option 1 are:

- forecast variation from electoral parity is over 10% in 11 wards and forecast to be close to 50% in ward 17 Culloden and Ardersier. Whilst the Commission can consider special geographical circumstances as a reason for parity to exceed recognised limits, this may be seen as an excessive number of wards with a variation from parity in excess of $\pm 10\%$.

Option 2a – 72 councillors

19. Option 2a proposes a ward design, using only 3 and 4-member wards, that aims to minimise change to the existing electoral arrangements, addresses variation from electoral parity and uses the Commission's methodology for councillor numbers from the 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements which recommended 72 councillors.

20. Option 2a retains 16 of the existing 21 wards for Highland Council area. Option 2b considers the recognised county boundaries of Caithness, Nairn and Sutherland.

21. Option 2a retains the existing arrangements in Caithness.

22. The two existing 3-member Sutherland wards (North, West and Central Sutherland and East Sutherland and Edderton) are both over-represented. When considering its recommendations for the 5th Reviews the Commission applied special geographical circumstances due to the remoteness and poor transport links within Sutherland, recommending a North, West and Central Sutherland ward with wide variation from parity. However other areas of Highland, such as Moidart, are arguably just as remote as Sutherland and also have limited transport links. Option 2a proposes a single 4-member Sutherland ward which

reduces councillor numbers in Sutherland by two. The existing East Sutherland and Edderton ward extends over the Dornoch Firth to include Edderton. Option 2a adopts the Dornoch Firth as a ward boundary at the southern end of the proposed Sutherland ward. This is a more recognisable ward boundary which follows the Edderton community council area boundary and adds approximately 300 electors to the proposed Tain and Easter Ross ward.

23. Option 2a retains all other ward boundaries with the exception of a small change to the boundary between Inverness Ness-side and Inverness Millburn wards. This small change transfers approximately 900 electors and ensures that the forecast variation from parity in the Inverness Ness-side ward is addressed. The border in this particular part of Inverness follows community council boundaries and a number of individual streets and has seen a number of changes during recent electoral reviews.
24. Whilst ward boundaries have been retained where possible, variation from parity has been addressed by simply adding a councillor to the Culloden and Ardersier ward and reducing the number of councillors in Sutherland. The Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward's forecast over-representation is addressed, as it becomes a 3 member ward.
25. As a result of extensive new housing development by Culloden and Tornagrain, the electorate of the Culloden and Ardersier ward is expected to increase by over 3,000 electors in the next 5 years. In order to improve representation, Option 2a proposes a 4-member Culloden and Ardersier ward which would address the projected increase in electorate due to increased housing development.
26. It should be noted that Inverness South ward's variation from parity is forecast to be +15% in 2024. Due to the nature of the boundary of this ward and the strong bounding geographical features it is difficult to alter the ward without having a disruptive effect on a number of neighbouring wards.
27. The electorates and associated variation from parity of the proposed wards for Option 2a are shown in the table below and the boundaries are shown in Appendix B:

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity (%)	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity (%)
1	Sutherland	4	10,796	5.9	10,441	1.1
2	Thurso and Northwest Caithness	4	10,083	-1.1	9,543	-7.6
3	Wick and East Caithness	4	9,815	-3.7	9,389	-9.1
4	Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	4	9,895	-3.0	9,441	-8.6
5	Cromarty Firth	4	9,643	-5.4	9,529	-7.8
6	Edderton, Tain and Easter Ross	3	7,350	-3.9	7,078	-8.6
7	Dingwall and Seaforth	4	10,063	-1.3	10,490	1.5
8	Black Isle	3	8,503	11.2	8,314	7.3
9	Eilean a' Chèo	4	8,579	-15.9	8,299	-19.7
10	Caol and Mallaig	3	7,003	-8.4	7,150	-7.7
11	Aird and Loch Ness	4	9,716	-4.7	9,585	-7.2
12	Inverness West	3	8,178	6.9	8,526	10.0
13	Inverness Central	3	8,641	13.0	8,224	6.1
14	Inverness Ness-side	3	7,117	-6.9	8,285	6.9

15	Inverness Millburn	3	8,668	13.3	8,466	9.3
16	Culloden and Ardersier	4	8,240	-19.2	11,297	9.4
17	Nairn and Cawdor	4	10,425	2.2	10,047	-2.7
18	Inverness South	4	11,543	13.2	11,962	15.8
19	Badenoch and Strathspey	4	10,637	4.3	11,310	9.5
20	Fort William and Ardnamurchan	3	8,646	13.1	8,567	10.6
		72	183,541		185,943	

28. The advantages of Option 2a are that it:

- retains the boundaries of 16 of the existing 21 wards minimising change and offering recognisable ward boundaries;
- accommodates the Commission's methodology for calculating councillor numbers with relatively little change to ward boundaries;
- maintains Eilean a' Chèo as a 4 member island ward;
- where possible, it ensures that remote and inaccessible areas are over, rather than under, represented; and
- addresses large variations from parity in Sutherland, Inverness and Culloden and Ardersier wards whilst accommodating changing electorate sizes due to growth in urban centres.

29. The disadvantages of Option 2a are:

- forecast variation from parity is over +10% in three wards. Two of these are close to the urban centre of Inverness. The Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward, whilst being in excess of +10% from parity is closer to parity than it is forecast to be in the existing arrangements. The Commission may consider special geographical circumstances in Eilean a' Chèo and, Fort William and Ardnamurchan as these may be considered to be more remote areas; and
- Option 2a, in proposing a single Sutherland ward, reduces representation in rural Sutherland. However this proposal would improve parity across the council area.

Option 2b – 72 councillors

30. Option 2b proposes a ward design, using only 3 and 4-member wards, that aims to minimise change to the existing electoral arrangements, addressing variation from electoral parity and following the Commission's methodology for councillor numbers from the 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements which recommended 72 councillors.

31. Option 2b retains 14 of the existing ward boundaries. Option 2b considers the recognised county boundaries of Caithness, Nairn and Sutherland.

32. Option 2b addresses variation from electoral parity in Inverness and Sutherland.

33. Option 2b adopts the same proposed ward boundaries in Sutherland as outlined above in Option 2a.

34. Option 2b also proposes a 4-member Culloden and Ardersier ward as described in Option 2a to address the projected increase in electorate and new housing developments.

35. The electorate of the Inverness South ward has grown since the 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements. In order to limit forecast variation from parity, Option 2b transfers approximately 1,600 electors from the Inverness South ward to the

neighbouring Aird and Loch Ness ward. The proposed ward boundary follows a stream at Fairways golf course.

36. There is wide forecast variation from electoral parity in the proposed Inverness Ness-side ward.
37. The Commission may wish to consider whether it is content for wards within the more densely populated Inverness area to be under-represented in comparison to more remote and rural areas such as Caithness, Ross-shire and Lochaber.
38. As mentioned above, Option 2b reduces councillor numbers by two in Sutherland and adds a councillor to the proposed Culloden and Ardersier ward. It also reduces councillor numbers by one in Skye (Eilean a' Chèò).
39. Option 2b proposes a 3-member Eilean a' Chèò ward. A 3-member Eilean a' Chèò ward offers variation from parity of 12%, forecast to fall to 7% (based on a total of 72 councillors). A 4-member Eilean a' Chèò ward offers variation from parity of -16%, forecast to extend to -20% (based on a total of 72 councillors).
40. Eilean a' Chèò is an island but is now linked to the mainland. It takes broadly the same amount of time to reach Portree in Skye from Inverness as it does to reach other remote areas such as Thurso, Durness or Mallaig.
41. The electorates and associated variation from parity of the proposed wards for Option 2b are shown in the table below and the boundaries are shown in Appendix C:

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Variation from parity (%)	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast variation from parity (%)
1	Thurso and Northwest Caithness	4	10,083	-1.1	9,543	-7.5
2	Wick and East Caithness	4	9,815	-3.7	9,389	-9.0
3	Sutherland	4	10,791	5.8	10,436	1.1
4	Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	4	9,895	-3.0	9,441	-8.5
5	Cromarty Firth	4	9,643	-5.4	9,529	-7.7
6	Tain and Easter Ross	3	7,355	-3.8	7,083	-8.5
7	Dingwall and Seaforth	4	10,063	-1.3	10,490	1.7
8	Black Isle	3	8,503	11.2	8,314	7.4
9	Eilean a' Chèò	3	8,579	12.2	8,299	7.2
10	Caol and Mallaig	3	7,003	-8.4	7,150	-7.6
11	Aird and Loch Ness	4	11,349	11.3	11,621	12.6
12	Inverness West	3	8,178	6.9	8,526	10.2
13	Inverness Central	3	8,641	13.0	8,224	6.3
14	Inverness Ness-side	3	8,151	6.6	9,257	19.6
15	Inverness Millburn	3	7,353	-3.9	7,010	-9.4
16	Culloden and Ardersier	4	8,521	-16.4	11,581	12.2
17	Nairn and Cawdor	4	10,425	2.2	10,047	-2.6
18	Inverness South	4	9,910	-2.8	9,926	-3.8
19	Badenoch and Strathspey	4	10,637	4.3	11,310	9.6
20	Fort William and Ardnamurchan	4	8,646	-15.2	8,567	-17.0
		72	183,541		185,743	

42. The advantages of Option 2b are:

- it minimises change by retaining 14 of the existing 21 ward boundaries that have been in place since May 2017 offering recognised ward boundaries;
- proposes 72 councillors, the same number as the Commission's methodology for councillor numbers from the 5th Reviews;

- where possible, it ensures that remote and inaccessible areas are over, rather than under, represented; and
- addresses large variations from parity in Sutherland, Inverness and Culloden and Ardersier wards whilst accommodating changing electorate sizes due to growth in urban centres.

43. The disadvantages of Option 2b are:

- Eilean a' Chèò whilst retained as a single ward, sees its representation drop to a 3-member ward;
- Inverness Ness-side ward has a wide forecast variation from parity.

Option 3 – 68 councillors

44. Option 3 proposes a ward design, using 3 and 4-member wards, that applies the Commission's methodology for determining councillor numbers from the 5th Reviews to the existing number of councillors, to further reduce councillor numbers from the current 74, to 68.

45. Option 3 retains 8 of the existing ward boundaries. Option 3 considers the recognised county boundaries of Caithness, Nairn and Sutherland.

46. A ward design with 67 councillors would require substantially more division of the council area and fewer existing wards could be retained.

47. Option 3 adopts the same ward boundary in Sutherland as described in Options 2a and 2b.

48. Option 3 reduces councillor numbers in Caithness by one, with Thurso and Northwest Caithness becoming a 3-member ward. It transfers approximately 1,800 electors from the Thurso and Northwest Caithness ward to the Wick and East Caithness ward. The proposed ward boundary follows a community council area boundary.

49. Option 3 proposes a 3-member Dingwall and Seaforth ward. It transfers Muir of Ord with approximately 2,800 electors to an Aird and Loch Ness ward. The proposed ward boundary follows a parish and community council area boundary. As a consequence, to keep Aird and Loch Ness closer to 10% of electoral parity, Fort Augustus with approximately 600 electors is transferred from the Aird and Loch Ness ward to a Fort William ward. The proposed ward boundary by Fort Augustus follows a parish and community council area boundary.

50. Option 3 merges the existing 4-member Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward with the 3-member Caol and Mallaig ward to create two 3-member wards called Fort William and Caol, Mallaig and Ardnamurchan. The boundary between these wards follows an easily identifiable ward boundary: Loch Linnhe and the Great Glen (Loch Lochy and the Caledonian Canal).

51. In Inverness, Option 3 merges three 3-member wards (Inverness West, Inverness Central and Inverness Millburn) to create two 4-member wards, named Inverness East and Inverness West. The proposed ward boundary between these wards makes use of existing ward boundaries, the River Ness and community council area boundaries.

52. The proposed Culloden and Ardersier ward boundary is also extended westwards, following a railway line to create a more easily identifiable boundary, adding a further 300 (approx) electors.
53. Option 3 proposes a 3-member Eilean a' Chèo ward, reducing councillor numbers in Skye by one.
54. There is wide forecast variation from electoral parity in the proposed Inverness Ness-side ward. The forecast is based on all expected housing developments being completed and occupied within a 5-year period.
55. The Commission may wish to consider wards within the more densely populated Inverness area to be under-represented in comparison to more remote and rural areas such as Caithness, Ross-shire and Lochaber.
56. 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 Appendix D:

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Variation from parity (%)	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast variation from parity (%)
1	Thurso and Northwest Caithness	3	8,268	2.1	7,700	-6.1
2	Wick and East Caithness	4	11,630	7.7	11,232	2.7
3	Sutherland	4	10,791	-0.1	10,436	-4.6
4	Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	4	9,895	-8.4	9,441	-13.7
5	Cromarty Firth	4	9,643	-10.7	9,529	-12.9
6	Tain and Easter Ross	3	7,355	-9.2	7,083	-13.7
7	Dingwall and Seaforth	3	7,265	-10.3	7,716	-5.9
8	Black Isle	3	8,503	5.0	8,314	1.3
9	Eilean a' Chèo	3	8,579	5.9	8,299	1.2
10	Caol, Mallaig and Ardnamurchan	3	7,707	-4.8	7,750	-5.5
11	Aird and Loch Ness	4	11,887	10.1	11,769	7.6
12	Inverness West	4	11,551	7.0	11,752	7.4
13	Inverness Ness-side	3	8,151	0.7	9,257	12.8
14	Inverness East	4	12,621	16.9	12,008	9.8
15	Culloden and Ardersier	4	8,521	-21.1	11,781	7.7
16	Nairn and Cawdor	4	10,425	-3.4	10,047	-8.1
17	Inverness South	4	11,543	6.9	11,962	9.4
18	Badenoch and Strathspey	4	10,637	-1.5	11,310	3.4
19	Fort William	3	8,569	5.8	8,557	4.3
		68	183,541		185,943	

57. The advantages of Option 3 are:
- it retains 8 of the existing 21 ward boundaries that have been in place since May 2017;
 - proposes under-representation in urban areas with better transport links in comparison to more remote and rural communities which are over-represented where possible; and
 - recognises areas of forecast electorate growth by increasing representation in Culloden and Ardersier ward.
58. The disadvantages of Option 3 are:
- in order to accommodate changes elsewhere Eilean a' Chèo ward is reduced from a 4 member ward to a 3 member ward; and
 - there is an overall reduction in representation in Inverness compared to the existing arrangements. The electorate in Inverness and surrounding areas is forecast to increase significantly in the next 5 years.

Option 4 – 69 councillors

59. Option 4 is a proposal for 69 councillors across 21 wards and proposes 2,3,4 and 5 member wards.
60. Option 4 proposes the retention of 10 of the existing wards. However, two of those, North, West and Central Sutherland and Fort William and Ardnamurchan would see a reduction in councillor numbers.
61. Option 4 considers the recognised county boundaries of Caithness, Nairn and Sutherland.
62. North, West and Central Sutherland is retained as a ward and even with a reduction to 2 councillors from 3 is forecast to be over-represented, although to a lesser degree than in the existing arrangements.
63. Proposed ward boundaries in Caithness consider the Commission's recommendations from its 4th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements. The proposed ward boundaries in Caithness see a single ward for the major settlements of Thurso and Wick and an additional Caithness ward. A third of all responses to the consultation for Highland Council area during the 5th Reviews referenced Caithness with some respondents making alternative proposals and others in opposition to changes of boundaries and councillor numbers in Caithness from the 4th Review's arrangements. In order to ensure parity and acknowledging local ties in these sparsely populated wards, extensive use has been made of the facility for 2 member wards which was not possible during the 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements.
64. Option 4 proposes a 2-member East Sutherland ward. It also adds Edderton to a Tain and Easter Ross ward.
65. In Option 4, the town of Dingwall is placed in a 5 member ward with the existing Cromarty Firth ward. The area south of Dingwall, in the existing Dingwall and Seaforth ward, is retained in a 2 member Seaforth ward. The northern boundary of the Seaforth ward is the Dingwall community council boundary, the entirety of which is placed in the Dingwall and Cromarty Firth ward.
66. As stated above, the main areas of anticipated electorate growth in Highland Council area are Inverness and surrounding areas. In order to accommodate this growth and make an overall reduction in councillor numbers Option 4 proposes significant changes to ward boundaries in Inverness. The proposed Inverness Ness-side ward is extended northwards to include the whole of Hilton, Milton and Castle Heather community council area which is currently contained within three separate wards. In addition to this proposed change, Inverness would be divided into two further wards making three in total rather than the existing four. The Inverness West ward is merged with the part of Inverness Central ward that lies to the west of the River Ness in Inverness. The remaining part of the existing Inverness Central ward would be merged with the existing Inverness Millburn ward to the east of the River Ness. This proposal draws on the strong bounding feature of the River Ness and the existing outer boundaries of the Inverness wards to the south and east of the city.
67. To the east of Inverness the boundary between the proposed Inverness East ward and Culloden and Ardersier ward is altered to accommodate Smithton and

Culloden community council area as a whole and ensure that the community by Resaurie is not split north of the trainline that runs through the area.

68. With these proposed changes, Inverness West and Central would become a 5 member ward, Inverness East and Millburn a 3 member ward and Inverness Ness-side would become a 4 member ward. In order to accommodate the large amount of growth forecast for the Culloden and Ardersier ward it would become a 4 member ward.

69. It should be noted that Inverness South ward's variation from parity is forecast to be +11% in 2024. As stated above, due to the nature of the boundary of this ward and the strong bounding geography it is difficult to alter the ward without having a profound and disruptive effect on a number of neighbouring wards. In addition to that the ward follows the A9 and has good connectivity along the A9 corridor.

70. The electorates and associated variation from parity for Option 4 are shown in the table below and the boundaries are shown in Appendix E:

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity (%)	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity (%)
1	North, West and Central Sutherland	2	4,833	-9.2	4,578	-15.1
2	Thurso	2	5,925	11.4	5,596	3.8
3	Caithness	3	8,489	6.4	7,994	-1.1
4	Wick	2	5,484	3.1	5,290	-1.8
5	East Sutherland	2	5,958	12.0	5,892	9.3
6	Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	4	9,895	-7.0	9,373	-13.0
7	Dingwall and Cromarty Firth	5	13,817	3.9	13,842	2.7
8	Tain, Easter Ross and Edderton	3	7,355	-7.8	7,083	-12.4
9	Seaforth	2	5,889	10.7	5,739	6.5
10	Black Isle	3	8,503	6.6	8,487	5.0
11	Eilean a' Chèò	3	8,579	7.5	8,299	2.7
12	Caol and Mallaig	3	7,003	-12.2	7,150	-11.6
13	Aird and Loch Ness	4	9,716	-8.7	9,585	-11.1
14	Inverness West & Central	5	14,400	8.3	14,358	6.6
15	Inverness Ness-Side	4	9,992	-6.1	10,988	1.9
16	Inverness Millburn East etc	3	7,912	-0.9	7,912	-2.1
17	Culloden and Ardersier	4	8,540	-19.7	11,799	9.5
18	Nairn and Cawdor	4	10,425	-2.0	10,047	-6.8
19	Inverness South	4	11,543	8.5	11,962	11.0
20	Badenoch and Strathspey	4	10,637	0.0	11,310	4.9
21	Fort William and Ardnamurchan	3	8,646	8.3	8,659	7.1
		69	183,541		185,943	

71. The advantages of Option 4 are it:

- takes advantage of the flexibility given by 2 and 5 member wards to retain local ties and to ensure parity is addressed where possible;

- offers ward boundaries in Caithness that recognise the boundaries from the 4th reviews, particularly around the main settlements of Wick and Thurso that received local support during the 5th reviews public consultation period; and

72. The disadvantages of Option 4 are it :

- makes a number of significant changes from the existing arrangements;
- six wards in excess of $\pm 10\%$ variation from parity although all but one over rather than under representing; and
- in order to accommodate changes elsewhere Eilean a' Chèò ward is reduced from a 4 member ward to a 3 member ward as is Fort William and Ardnamurchan.

Conclusions

Legislation

73. The Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill could allow the Commission to recommend 2 and 5-member wards across Scotland as well as the current 3 and 4-member wards (and single-member wards where there are inhabited islands. The timescales for the legislation passing through Parliament is summer 2020.

74. Option 4 proposes five 2-member wards and two 5-member wards.

Councillor numbers

75. The Commission's methodology including a 10% cap on change recommends 67 councillors for Highland council area. The 5th Reviews applied a 10% cap on change as well as recognising special geographic circumstances, reducing councillor numbers from 80 to 74.

76. An option with 67 councillors could be seen as a significant change in councillor numbers within a 5-year period (80 councillors in early 2017 to 67 in 2022).

Geography

77. Highland is the largest council by area in Scotland and is nearly four times the size of the second largest council area (Argyll and Bute).

78. Highland Council area contains a significant number of remote communities and island communities.

79. Appendix F shows travel time to the Council's headquarters in Inverness. It would appear, based on travel times, that issues of connectivity and special geographic circumstances potentially apply as much to those remote areas in the south of the council area such as the Ardnamurchan and Morar peninsulas as they do Durness and Thurso in the north.

Island wards

80. Eilean a' Chèò is the largest populated island in the council area with 8,579 electors. It is the only island within the area that could be considered as a ward. Raasay is the second largest populated island with approximately 150 electors

and the Small Isles (Canna, Eigg, Muck, Rum) have a combined electorate of approximately 150 electors, too few for a single-member island ward.

81. All four options retain Eilean a' Chèo as a single ward although options 2b, 3 and 4 reduce the number of councillors from 4 to 3.

Inverness

82. Approximately 50,000 electors reside within Inverness and its surrounding area and over half of Highland Council's electorate reside within a 20 mile radius of Inverness. Nairn is second largest town within the council area with approximately 8,000 electors.

5th Reviews

83. The 5th Reviews recommended 74 councillors, two more than the Commission's methodology. The Commission considered special geographical circumstances during its 5th Reviews as a reason to depart from its methodology. The areas where the special circumstances applied were: Caithness and Sutherland due to its remoteness, sparse population and limited transport links; and Eilean a' Cheò to improve electoral parity within the ward.

84. During the 5th Reviews consultation, there were 33 comments and the main theme was opposition to the proposals in Caithness which reduced the numbers of wards in the area by one and reduced the number of councillors by two.

Options summary

85. Option 1 retains the existing arrangements from the 5th reviews that have been in place since May 2017 but it offers wide variation from electoral parity.
86. Option 2a proposes 72 councillors across 20 wards. It aims to address variation from parity while minimising change to the existing arrangements by retaining 16 wards. Option 2a addresses parity in Inverness and Sutherland and proposes a 4-member Eilean a' Chèo ward.
87. Option 2b also proposes 72 councillors across 19 wards. It aims to address variation from parity while minimising change to the existing arrangements by retaining 14 wards. Option 2b addresses parity in a number of areas and proposes a 3-member Eilean a' Chèo ward.
88. Option 3 proposes 68 councillors across 19 wards and retains 8 wards from the existing arrangements. Option 3 aims to minimise change while addressing variation from electoral parity across the council area.
89. Option 4 proposes 69 across 21 wards and retains 8 wards from the existing arrangements. It also aims to minimise change while addressing variation from electoral parity across the council area.
90. All four options propose at least one ward with variation from parity over 10%, although the Commission can consider special geographical circumstances due to the remoteness of many parts of the Highland council area and the issues of travel and connectivity with centres of population and also the council headquarters itself.

Population change

91. Community Partnership Planning areas are described by Highland Council as bringing together public agencies, third sector organisations and other key community groups to work collaboratively with the people of Highland to deliver better outcomes. These planning areas are a further recognised way of grouping together communities and by aggregating the electors across these planning areas we can see further evidence that the main area of forecast growth in the council area is Inverness and remote and rural areas such as Caithness, Sutherland and Skye are forecast to see a drop in electorate.

Community Partnership Area	Current Electorate (2019)	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Change
Badenoch and Strathspey	10,600	11,275	675
Caithness	19,823	18,849	-974
East Ross	16,759	16,387	-372
Inverness	61,961	66,112	4,151
Lochaber	15,733	15,796	63
Mid Ross	21,851	22,056	205
Nairn and Nairnshire	10,068	9,707	-361
Skye, Lochalsh and West Ross	15,806	15,167	-639
Sutherland	10,940	10,593	-347

Recommendations

92. The Commission is invited to consider which options it wishes the Secretariat to informally discuss with Highland Council, along with possible ward names, before confirming its Initial Proposals at its next meeting.

Secretariat
January 2020





















