

LGBCS Paper 2527**2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements
Highland council area****Purpose**

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

Background

2. At its meeting of 4 February the Commission considered Paper 2520 and five ward design options for Highland council area. The five options included:
 - Option 1 retained 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' Chèo 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.
3. The five designs offered flexibility with councillor numbers, presenting designs with between 68 and 74 councillors.

Meeting with Council Officers

4. The Secretariat informally discussed with officers from Highland Council in March 2020 their views on local ties within the area and to seek advice on handling of the public consultation later in 2020. A note of that discussion is enclosed with the meeting papers.

Options

5. This paper sets out three options for the Commission to consider. Option 1 is unchanged from Paper 2520. Each of the options is considered in more detail below, but in summary:
 - Option 1 – Commission's recommendations from its 5th Reviews and the existing electoral arrangements;
 - Option 2 – minimises change to the existing electoral arrangements, retaining 74 councillors; and
 - Option 3 – proposes 72 councillors (the same number as the Commission's methodology for councillor numbers), aligns with recognised boundaries, and improves variation from electoral parity.

Option 1 – Recommendations from 5th Reviews/ Existing electoral arrangements

6. Option 1 retains the existing electoral arrangements, making no changes to the existing ward boundaries or number of councillors. The existing electoral arrangements have been in place since May 2017.
7. 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 one and reducing councillor numbers by six.
8. During the 5th Reviews public consultation stage there were approximately 30 responses. The main theme to emerge was opposition to the proposals in Caithness that reduced the number of wards in the area by one and reduced the number of councillors in the area by two.
9. 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 and Appendix D:

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	

10. The advantages of Option 1 are:

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

11. 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. The Commission can consider special geographical circumstances as a reason for wide variation from parity in the more remote areas of Highland.

Option 2

12. Option 2 aims to minimise change to the existing electoral arrangements by retaining ten of the existing ward boundaries. Option 2 aims to consider recognised boundaries, such as historical county boundaries and Highland Councils local community partnership area boundaries, and addresses some concerns raised regarding the existing ward boundaries in Caithness and Inverness.
13. Option 2 proposes an arrangement with 74 councillors, representing two 2-member wards, four 3-member wards, twelve 4-member wards and two 5-member wards.
14. The two existing Caithness wards (Thurso and Northwest Caithness, and Wick and East Caithness) are forecast to be overrepresented. There was some opposition to the Caithness ward boundaries during the 5th Reviews public consultation so option 2 reverts to the previous ward boundaries in Caithness. It proposes a 2-member Thurso ward, a 2-member Wick ward and a 3-member Caithness Landward ward. These ward boundaries were in use from 2007 to 2017 but were overrepresented during that time. The 4th Reviews recommended a: 3-member Wick ward (-13%); 3-member Thurso ward (-2%); and 4-member Landward Caithness ward (-7%).
15. Option 2 considers the historical Caithness - Sutherland county boundary and merges the existing 3-member North, West and Central Sutherland ward and 3-member East Sutherland and Edderton ward to create a 5-member Sutherland ward. Forecast variation from electoral parity is -17% in the proposed Sutherland ward but this is a remote rural area with limited transport links and the Commission can consider special geographical circumstances here. The Commission could also contemplate a 4-member Sutherland ward, see Option 3. Variation from electoral parity in the existing North, West and Central Sutherland ward is -35% and the East Sutherland and Edderton ward is -16%.
16. Option 2 places Edderton within a Tain ward to create a more easily identifiable ward boundary. Edderton, with approx 300 electors, is currently situated within an East Sutherland and Edderton ward which crosses the Cromarty Firth. The proposed boundary also follows the historical Sutherland county and Ross and Cromarty county boundaries.
17. In Inverness, Option 2 merges the existing Inverness West, Inverness Central and Inverness Millburn wards to create a 5-member Inverness West ward and a 4-member Inverness East ward. The proposed Inverness West ward has forecast variation from electoral parity of +12% but the boundary between these wards follows the River Ness, creating a more easily identifiable ward boundary.
18. Option 2 transfers approximately 2,000 forecast electors from the Inverness South ward to the Inverness Ness-side ward. The proposed boundary follows a stream by Fairways golf course. The golf course acts as a wide border between wards and new housing developments in the south of Inverness.

19. Option 2 transfers approximately 500 forecast electors from the existing Inverness Millburn ward to the Culloden and Ardersier ward to create a more clearly defined ward boundary between the Culloden and Inverness wards. Option 2 proposes a 4-member Culloden and Ardersier ward, increasing representation in the ward due to the expected large growth of housing developments within the ward. The Culloden and Ardersier ward is expected to grow by over 3,000 electors over the next 5 years. The Commission could consider a 5-member Culloden and Ardersier ward, as shown in Option 3.
20. Option 2 retains a 4-member Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward with forecast variation from electoral parity of nearly -15%. Fort William and Ardnamurchan contains some of the more remote areas of Highland, for example it takes longer to travel from Inverness to Ardnamurchan than it does from Inverness to Durness in Sutherland. Therefore the Commission can consider special geographical circumstances within this ward. The Commission could consider a 3-member Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward, as shown in Option 3.
21. Option 2 proposes a 4-member Eilean a' Chèo (Skye) ward with forecast variation from electoral parity of -17%. The Commission can consider special geographical circumstances in Skye because it is an island and remote, although it is connected to the mainland by a bridge. The Commission could consider a 3-member Skye ward, as shown in Option 3.
22. Option 2 retains the existing Badenoch and Strathspey ward with forecast variation from electoral parity of +12%. The Badenoch and Strathspey ward follows the natural features on Speyside and has good road links with Inverness.
23. 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 & E:

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity %	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity %
1	Sutherland	5	10,791	-13.0%	10,436	-16.9%
2	Caithness	3	8,489	14.1%	8,046	6.7%
3	Wick	2	5,484	10.6%	5,290	5.3%
4	Thurso	2	5,925	19.4%	5,596	11.4%
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	3	7,355	-1.2%	7,083	-6.0%
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' Chèo	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	5	14,091	13.6%	14,140	12.5%
14	Inverness East	4	10,081	1.6%	9,620	-4.3%
15	Inverness Ness-Side	4	9,784	-1.4%	11,293	12.4%
16	Culloden and Ardersier	4	8,521	-14.1%	11,781	17.2%
17	Nairn and Cawdor	4	10,425	5.1%	10,047	0.0%
18	Inverness South	4	9,910	-0.1%	9,926	-1.2%
19	Badenoch and Strathspey	4	10,637	7.2%	11,310	12.5%
20	Fort William and Ardnamurchan	4	8,646	-12.9%	8,567	-14.8%
		74	183,541		185,943	

24. The advantages of Option 2 are it:

- minimises change to the existing electoral arrangements by retaining ten of the existing ward boundaries;
- considers recognised boundaries such as county boundaries, Highland Council local community planning areas and natural features;
- offers flexibility with variation from electoral parity in remote areas such as Sutherland, Skye and Ardnamurchan due to their remoteness from Inverness; and
- addresses forecast variation from electoral parity in the Culloden and Ardersier ward.

25. The disadvantages of Option 2 are:

- it contains wards with wide variation from electoral parity.

Option 3

26. Option 3 retains six of the existing ward boundaries and also considers recognised boundaries such as historical county boundaries and Highland Council's local community partnership area boundaries.

27. Option 3 proposes an arrangement with 72 councillors, the same number as the Commission's methodology for councillor numbers, representing two 2-member wards, eight 3-member wards, six 4-member wards and four 5-member wards.

28. Option 3 follows the same proposed ward boundaries in Caithness, Sutherland and Tain, as described above in Option 2 but proposes a 4-member Sutherland ward to improve variation from electoral parity in this area.

29. Option 3 proposes a ward boundary that follows the Mid Ross-West Ross Highland community partnership area boundary and places Strathpeffer, with approximately 2,500 electors, within the proposed Dingwall and Seaforth ward. As a consequence the Wester Ross and Lochalsh ward becomes a 3-member ward and Dingwall and Seaforth a 5-member ward. The Highland community partnership areas are based on local community ties and historical boundaries.
30. Option 3 reverts to the previous Black Isle ward boundary, from 2007-2017, to better reflect local ties within the Black Isle. It transfers approx. 400 electors from the Dingwall and Seaforth ward to the Black Isle ward but forecast variation from electoral parity is +12%.
31. Option 3 proposes the same ward boundaries in Inverness as option 2 by merging the existing Inverness West, Central and Millburn wards to create two wards. Option 3 names these wards Inverness North West and Inverness North East.
32. Option 3 also follows a similar ward boundary to Option 2 at Fairways golf course but proposes an Inverness South West ward which extends southwards to include the east-side of Loch Ness, using Loch Ness to create a more easily identifiable ward boundary. Option 3 renames the Inverness South ward as Inverness South East.
33. Option 3 proposes a 5-member Culloden and Ardersier ward. The ward follows the same boundary as Option 2 but it aims to address the large increase in electorate expected over the next 5-years.
34. Option 3 proposes a 3-member Fort William and Ardersier ward and 3-member Eilean a' Chèo ward, reducing councillor numbers in each ward by one. It improves variation from electoral parity in these more remote wards but does not consider special geographical circumstances.
35. 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 & F:

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity %	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity %
1	Sutherland	4	10,791	5.8%	10,436	1.0%
2	Caithness	3	8,489	11.0%	8,046	3.8%
3	Wick	2	5,484	7.6%	5,290	2.4%
4	Thurso	2	5,925	16.2%	5,596	8.3%
5	Wester Ross and Lochalsh	3	7,388	-3.4%	7,024	-9.3%
6	Cromarty Firth	4	9,643	-5.4%	9,529	-7.8%
7	Tain and Easter Ross	3	7,355	-3.8%	7,083	-8.6%
8	Dingwall and Seaforth	5	12,178	-4.5%	12,538	-2.9%
9	Black Isle	3	8,895	16.3%	8,683	12.1%
10	Eilean a' Chèò	3	8,579	12.2%	8,299	7.1%
11	Caol and Mallaig	3	7,003	-8.4%	7,150	-7.7%
12	Aird	3	8,250	7.9%	8,187	5.7%
13	Inverness North West	5	14,091	10.6%	14,140	9.5%
14	Inverness North East	4	10,081	-1.1%	9,620	-6.9%
15	Inverness South West	5	11,250	-11.7%	12,691	-1.7%
16	Culloden and Ardersier	5	8,521	-33.1%	11,781	-8.8%
17	Nairn and Cawdor	4	10,425	2.2%	10,047	-2.7%
18	Inverness South East	4	9,910	-2.8%	9,926	-3.9%
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	

36. The advantages of Option 3 are it:

- improves variation from electoral parity across the whole council area;
- minimises change to the existing electoral arrangements by retaining six of the existing ward boundaries; and
- considers recognised boundaries such as county boundaries and Highland Council local community planning areas;

37. The disadvantages of Option 3 are:

- it does not consider special geographical circumstances in remote areas such as Sutherland, Skye, or Ardnamurchan.

Conclusions

Councillor numbers

38. The Commission's methodology for councillor numbers, including a 10% cap on change, recommends 72 councillors for Highland council area. The 5th Reviews recognised special geographic circumstances in the area and recommended 74 councillors, reducing councillor numbers by six.

39. Applying the Commission's methodology based on the existing 74 councillor numbers would result in 67 councillors and could be seen as a significant change in councillor numbers within a short 5-year period (80 councillors in early 2017 to 67 by 2022).

40. Options 1 and 2 retain 74 councillors and consider special geographical circumstances due to the remoteness and poor transport links within Highland.

41. Option 3 proposes 72 councillors, the same number as the Commission's methodology for councillor numbers, but representation is reduced in some of the more rural parts of Highland such as Skye, Sutherland and Ardnamurchan.
42. Highland is the largest council by area in Scotland and is nearly four times the size of the second largest, Argyll and Bute. The geography and poor transport links make it challenging for councillors to represent communities within their wards. It takes at least 2.5 hours to travel from remote areas in Caithness, Sutherland, Skye and Lochaber to Inverness (Highland Council headquarters).

Island wards

43. Eilean a' Chèo 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 an island ward.
44. All three options retain Eilean a' Chèo as a single ward and do not link it with the mainland.
45. Options 1 and 2 retain Eilean a' Chèo as a 4-member ward considering special geographical circumstances as it is an island, although connected to the mainland by a bridge.
46. Option 3 proposes a 3-member Eilean a' Chèo ward to improve variation from electoral parity.
47. Raasay is the second largest populated island with approximately 150 electors.
48. The small isles (Canna, Eigg, Muck, Rum) have a combined electorate of approximately 150 electors and close links with Mallaig due to the ferry service. All three options keep these islands within a Caol and Mallaig ward.

Legislation - Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill

49. The expected introduction of the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill will allow the Commission to consider greater flexibility with 2 or 5-member wards.
50. Options 2 and 3 both revert to the previous ward boundaries in Caithness in use from 2007 - 2017. They propose a 2-member Thurso ward and 2-member Wick ward. During the 5th Reviews the Commission could not consider smaller 2-member wards and so created two larger 4-member wards in Caithness which were opposed by some at that time.
51. Option 2 proposes two 5-member wards while option 3 proposes four 5-member wards.

Electorate and forecasting

52. Legislation states that the Commission must consider 5-year electorate forecasts when developing its proposals. Nearly all of the existing wards show minimal change in electorate over the 5 year period. The wards showing the most

significant changes include: Culloden and Ardersier (+3,200 electors); Inverness Ness-side (+1,000 electors); and Badenoch and Strathspey (+700 electors).

53. The forecasts highlight that the electorate of Highland is expected to continue to expand within the Inverness area and shrink in more rural areas of Highland.
54. The Culloden and Ardersier ward shows a significant growth in electorate, with an increase of over 3,000 electors forecast. The existing Culloden and Ardersier ward is a 3-member ward. Option 2 considers a 4-member Culloden and Ardersier ward while Option 3 considers a 5-member Culloden and Ardersier ward.
55. It is difficult to accurately forecast whether all developments will be built and occupied within the next 5 years.

5th Reviews

56. During the 5th Reviews consultation, there were approximately 30 comments and the main theme was opposition to the ward boundaries in Caithness which reduced the number of wards in Caithness by one and reduced the number of councillors by two. Between 2007 to 2017 ten councillors represented Caithness.
57. Options 2 and 3 both revert to the previous ward boundaries in Caithness. They propose Wick, Thurso and Landward Caithness wards but with a total of seven councillors representing Caithness.

County boundaries

58. Highland covers a large area and includes several historical county boundaries that are still recognised today. They are: Caithness; Sutherland; Inverness-shire; Nairn; Ross and Cromarty; and partly Argyllshire. All of the options aim to consider the county boundaries although Ardnamurchan was historically within the Argyllshire county.

Highland Council local community partnership areas

59. Highland Council has nine local community partnership areas. They help Highland Council work more collaboratively with local communities. The local community partnership areas are based on local communities and include: Badenoch and Strathspey; Caithness; East Ross; Inverness; Lochaber; Mid Ross; Nairn and Nairnshire; Skye, Lochalsh and West Ross; and Sutherland.
60. All three options aim to consider the local community partnership area boundaries but Option 3 better reflects local community partnership area boundaries in mid Ross-shire.

Options summary

61. All three options aim to minimise change and consider recognised boundaries.

62. Option 1 retains the existing electoral arrangements that have been in place since 2017 but it offers wide variation from electoral parity across the council area and specifically within the Culloden and Ardersier ward.
63. Option 2 aims to minimise change, proposes 74 councillors, considers local ties in Caithness and improves variation from electoral parity for Inverness wards.
64. Option 3 proposes 72 councillors, considers local ties in Caithness and improves variation from electoral parity throughout the council area.

Public consultation

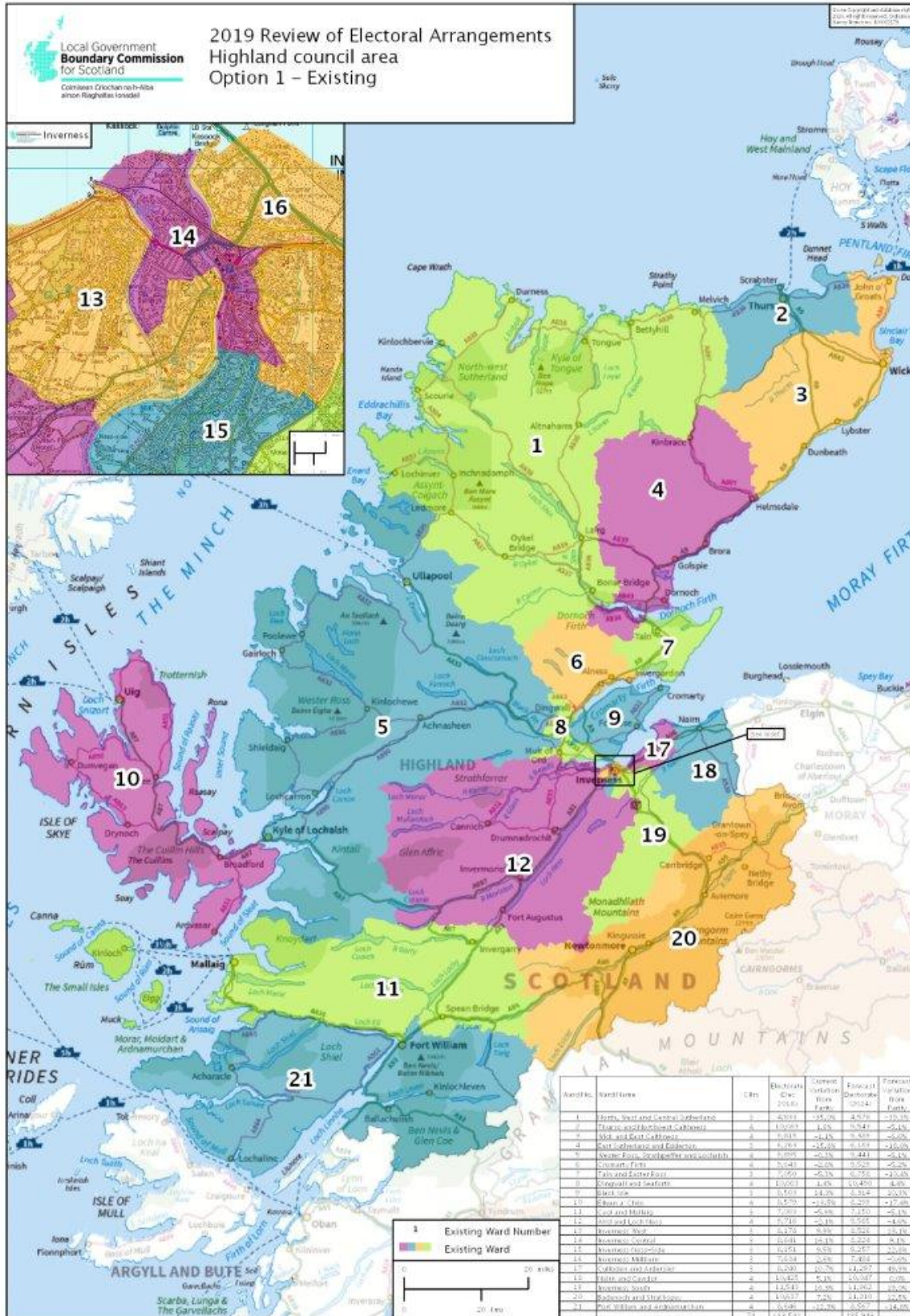
65. At the Secretariat's discussion with Highland Council there were no suggestions of any local community meetings in Highland that the Commission could attend to raise awareness of the public consultation.

Recommendations

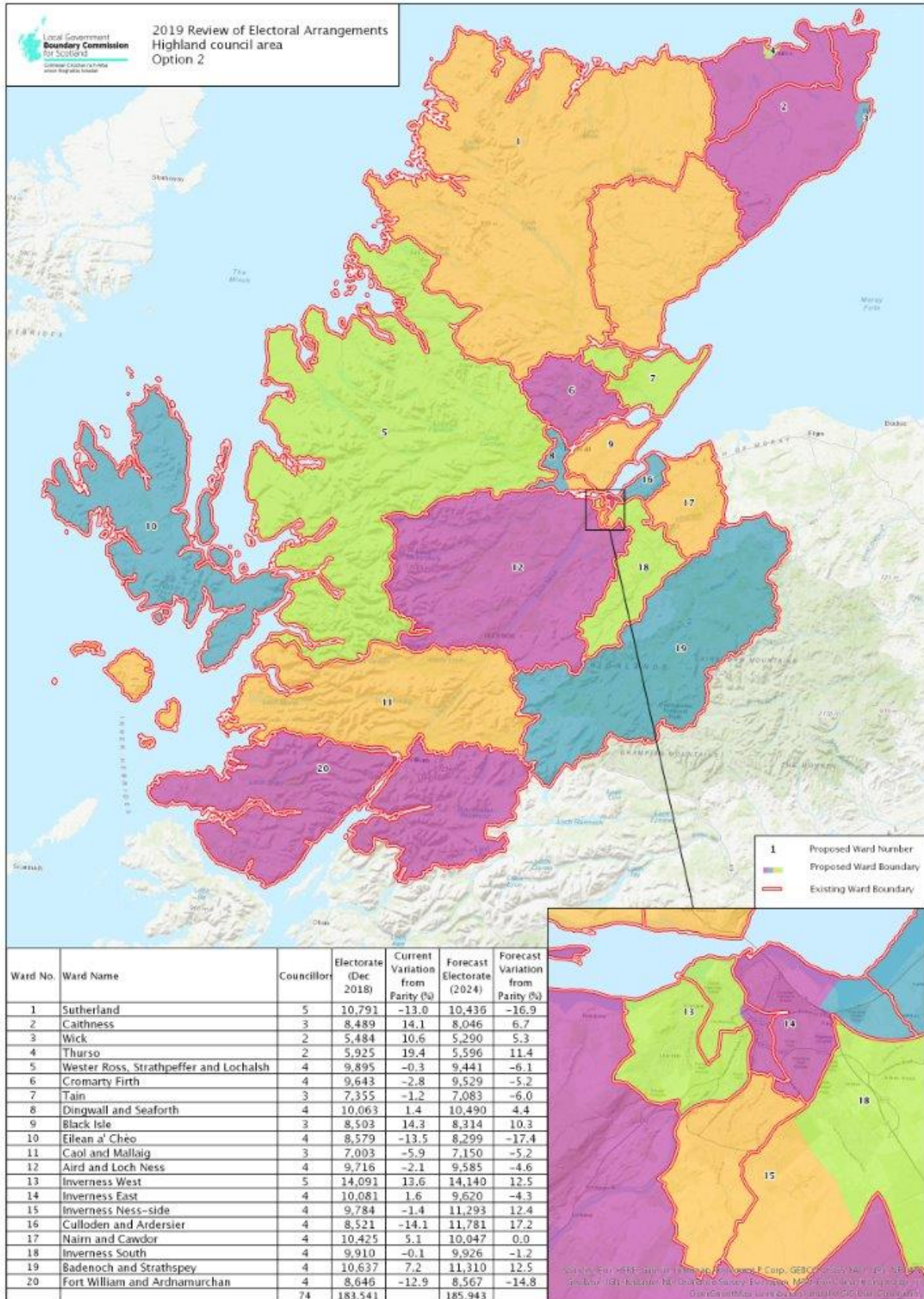
66. The Commission is invited to agree its Initial Proposals for the 2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements in Highland council area.

**Secretariat
April 2020**

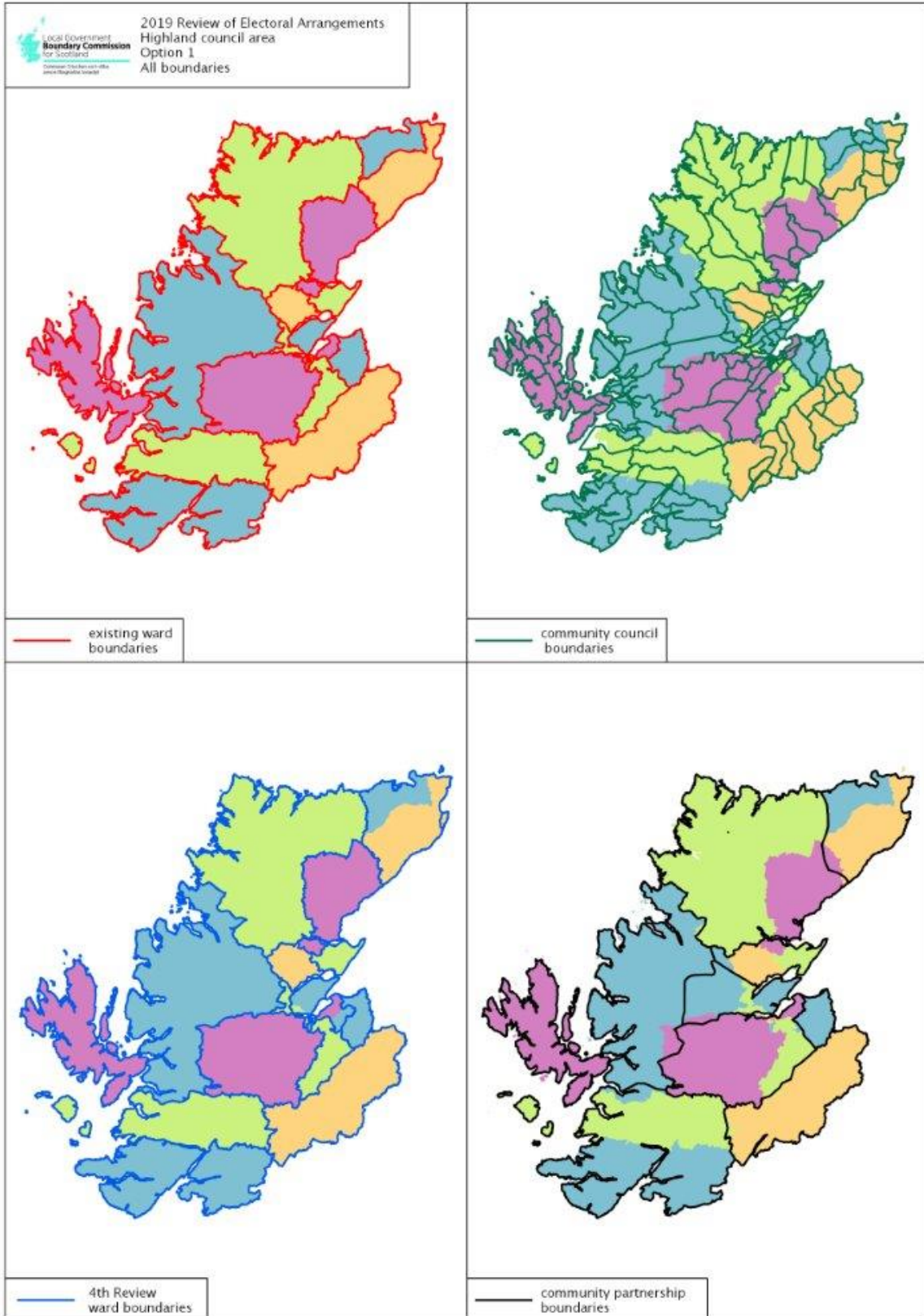
Appendix A Option 1 - Existing Electoral Arrangements



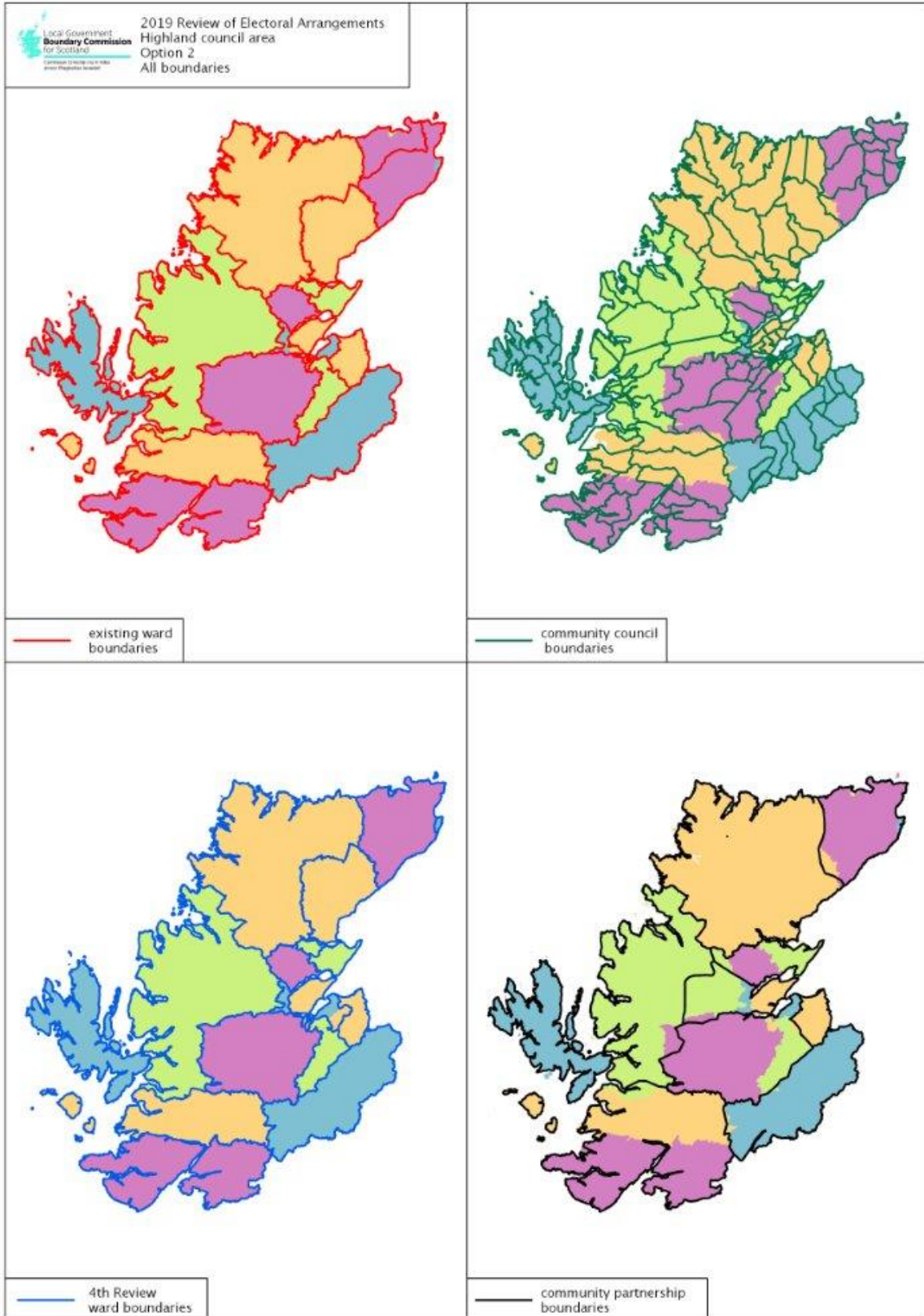
**Appendix B
Option 2**



Appendix D Option 1



Appendix E Option 2



Appendix F Option 3

