

2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements Final Recommendations for Highland council area

For information

1. The Commission is invited to consider responses to the public consultation on its Initial Proposals for the 2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements in Highland council area, consider if any changes are required to its Initial Proposals and agree its Final Recommendations.

Electoral arrangements at the start of this review

2. At the start of the review Highland council area was represented by 74 councillors representing 21 wards.
3. The electorates and associated variation from electoral parity for the existing electoral arrangements 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	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	16.3%	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	

Initial Proposals – Consultation with Councils

4. The Commission agreed to adopt its methodology for councillor numbers from its 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements for this review. The 5th Reviews' methodology placed Highland council area within a category with the most rural council areas with below average deprivation, with a ratio of electors per councillor of 2,800:1.

5. The methodology recommended 67 councillors for Highland council area ($183,541 \div 2,800 = 66$, but 10% limit on change = 67). Applying the methodology strictly would have resulted in a significant change of councillor numbers within a 5-year period (80 councillors early 2017 to 67 May 2022).
6. The existing electoral arrangements in Highland council area offered variation from electoral parity of over 10% in eight wards: North, West and Central Sutherland; East Sutherland and Edderton; Black Isle; Eilean a' Chèò; Inverness Central; Culloden and Ardersier; Inverness South; and Fort William and Ardnamurchan.
7. The Initial Proposals presented an electoral arrangement of 72 councillors representing 20 wards. They:
 - took account of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and retained Eilean a' Chèò as an island ward and renamed Caol and Mallaig to include a reference to the Small Isles and so recognise the island communities within the ward. The Commission considered special geographical circumstances as they apply to Skye and concluded that the level of forecast variation from electoral parity with 4 councillors (-20%) was not justifiable and therefore proposed a 3 member Eilean a' Chèò ward, a reduction of one member from the existing ward;
 - took account of the Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020 that allows the use of 2-member and 5-member wards to design wards that consider local ties in Caithness and Dingwall and create more easily identifiable ward boundaries in Inverness and to the south of Inverness;
 - made no changes to the boundaries of six of the existing wards: Caol, Mallaig and the Small Isles (previously Caol and Mallaig); Fort William and Ardnamurchan; Badenoch and Strathspey; Nairn and Cawdor; Cromarty Firth; and Eilean a' Chèò;
 - reduced variation from electoral parity in Caithness and Sutherland whilst recognising historical boundaries in the area;
 - considered special geographic circumstances in relation to variation from electoral parity in the proposed Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward due to its remoteness and poor transport links;
 - recognised local community ties in the Black Isle, Thurso and Wick; and
 - took account of the expected electorate growth in the proposed Culloden and Ardersier ward.
8. The electorates and associated variation from electoral parity for the consultation with Highland Council are shown in the table below and the boundaries are shown in Appendix C.

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Variation from electoral Parity (%)	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from electoral Parity (%)
1	Sutherland	4	10,791	5.8	10,436	1.0
2	Caithness	3	8,489	11.0	8,046	3.9
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, Easter Ross and Edderton	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' Chèo	3	8,579	12.2	8,299	7.1
11	Caol, Mallaig and the Small Isles	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	Inverness South East	4	9,910	-2.8	9,926	-3.9
17	Culloden and Ardersier	4	8,521	-16.4	11,781	14.0
18	Nairn and Cawdor	4	10,425	2.2	10,047	-2.7
19	Badenoch and Strathspey	4	10,637	4.3	11,310	9.5
20	Fort William and Ardnamurchan	4	8,646	-15.2	8,567	-17.1
		72	183,541		185,943	

9. The Commission consulted on its Initial Proposals with Highland Council for a 2-month period from 16 July to 30 September 2020.

10. Highland Council did not respond to the consultation.

Initial Proposals – Public Consultation

11. The Commission's Initial Proposals for public consultation were unchanged from the consultation with Highland Council.

12. The 12-week public consultation was conducted from 4 November 2020 until 26 January 2021.

Summary of responses – Public Consultation

13. 276 responses were received with approx. 240 submitted directly to the consultation site. A spreadsheet of all responses has been sent to the Commission and this paper captures the main themes and arguments presented.

14. Highland Council responded to the consultation, as did one MP, one MSP, seven Councillors, seven local political parties, over 50 community councils and over 200 members of the public. One response included a petition with over 1,000 signatures opposing the proposals in Caithness, Sutherland and Skye ([Petition · Reject the Boundary Commissions proposals for rural Highland · Change.org](#)). The petition concerns included what is seen as :

- decline in local services, employment opportunities and local decision making across the region;
- erosion of local representation in remote and rural communities;
- reduction of representation in Skye;

15. We ask respondents if they are responding on behalf of an organisation. All responses to the consultation are considered equally.

Key themes

16. The main themes raised during the consultation were:

- opposition to the review;
- opposition to a reduction in councillor numbers in Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross and Skye;

- opposition to the proposed ward boundaries in Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross and Loch Ness;
- urban Inverness gaining representation at the expense of rural wards;
- little support for the proposals, where there had been change;
- desire to retain the existing electoral arrangements;
- no consideration given to the large areas councillors have to travel within their wards; and
- a desire for more remote areas to have a different ratio of electors per councillor.

17. There was little support for the Commission's proposals overall although some specific changes were welcomed.

Highland Council response

18. Highland Council reject the proposals, oppose the review and wish to retain the existing electoral arrangements. In summary they further state the Commission should:

- only conduct a review of inhabited island wards and not mainland wards;
- adopt the same ratio for determining councillor numbers in island council areas, 1:800, for remote and rural areas;
- retain a 4-member Skye ward;
- apply special geographical circumstances consistently across the council area; and
- retain the existing number of councillors in Caithness and Sutherland.

19. The Highland Council response also includes comments on the proposals from individual councillors. The comments generally oppose the reduction of councillor numbers on Caithness, Sutherland, Ross-shire and Skye. However there was some support for the proposed ward boundaries for: Black Isle; Tain, Easter Ross and Edderton; and in Inverness. The Highland Council response can be found in Appendix A.

General comments

20. 30% of all respondents responded to the question, "What general comments would you like to make regarding the Commission's proposals for councillor numbers and wards in Highland Council area?"

21. 19% of the general comments mentioned Inverness or rural wards. Of those, 13% felt a bias that Inverness wards were gaining councillors at the expense of rural wards and feared there would be less investment in rural areas. Others wished to divide Highland Council into smaller councils or apply special geographical considerations in more rural areas.

22. 11% of the general responses made general comments which included a preference for: fewer councillors; more councillors; retaining the existing electoral arrangements; single-member wards; different methodology for determining councillor numbers that gives more consideration to rurality; reviewing electorate forecasts; and concerns with proportionality for 2-member wards.

Comments on individual wards

23. The consultation then asked respondents to comment on individual wards. These are summarised below by individual wards or groups of neighbouring wards.

Caithness/ Sutherland wards

24. The Commission's Initial Proposals propose 11 councillors for Caithness and Sutherland, representing two 2-member wards for Thurso and Wick, a 3-member Caithness ward and a 4-member Sutherland ward.

25. From 2007 to 2017, 16 councillors represented Caithness and Sutherland. Since 2017, 14 councillors have represented Caithness and Sutherland.

26. The electorate of the existing Caithness and Sutherland wards (East Sutherland and Edderton, North, West and Central Sutherland, Thurso and Northwest Caithness) is forecast to decline by approximately 750 electors in the next five years (from 24,731 to 23,505). The actual electorate has shown a small increase from 24,907 electors in 2017 to 24,731 electors in 2018 and 25,025 electors in 2019.

27. The proposed Caithness and Sutherland wards received the most comments and followed a similar theme.

28. 58% of all responses to the consultation focussed on the proposed Caithness, Sutherland, Thurso and Wick wards. 34% commented on Sutherland, 11% on Caithness, 7% Wick and 6% Thurso. One response included a petition with over 1,000 signatures opposing the proposals in Caithness, Sutherland and Skye.

29. The main comments/themes raised in this area include:

- strong opposition to a reduction in councillor numbers in remote, rural areas with poor transport links;
- the proposals do not consider the size or geography of the area or the distances to travel;
- opposition to the proposed ward boundaries in both Caithness and Sutherland;
 - opposition to urban Wick and Thurso wards and a rural Caithness ward. Desire to retain the existing electoral arrangements;
 - opposition to one large Sutherland ward because there is little in common between the more populated east-coast communities and those in the north and west of Sutherland; an increase in travel time for councillors to attend meeting in remote dispersed communities;
 - opposition as highlighted in the petition (para 15);
- a desire to retain the existing ward boundaries and councillor numbers;
- special geographical considerations should apply because it is a sparsely populated rural area with limited transport links;
- suggestions that rural areas in Caithness and Sutherland should have a ratio of councillors to electors of 1:800, the same ratio as island council areas; and
- a feeling that rural areas like Caithness and Sutherland are losing councillors and services at the expense of Inverness. Some suggested splitting Highland into smaller council areas. Alternative suggestions are discussed later in the paper.

Wester Ross and Lochalsh ward

30. The Commission's proposals amended the existing 4-member Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh ward boundary by Strathpeffer to create a 3-member Wester Ross and Lochalsh ward.

31. 12% of all respondents commented on this ward. Similar themes to Caithness and Sutherland were raised in opposition to the proposals including:

- strong opposition to a reduction in councillor numbers in a remote, rural area with poor transport links;
- the proposals do not consider the size or geography of the area or the distances to travel;
- a desire to retain the existing ward boundaries and councillor numbers;
- a need for more councillors;
- proposals split community council areas and newly established Area Committees;
- special geographical considerations should apply because it is a sparsely populated rural area with limited transport links; and
- suggestion that it should have a ratio of councillors to electors of 1:800, the same ratio as island council areas.

32. Six responses commented on the boundary by Strathpeffer. Three stated it broke local ties and three supported the boundary, with one suggestion to retain a 4-member Wester Ross ward.

Dingwall and Seaforth

33. The proposals created a 5-member ward with the addition of Strathpeffer.

34. 4% of all respondents commented on this ward.

35. Three responses commented on the ward boundary by Strathpeffer. Two supported the boundary because of links between Strathpeffer and Dingwall.

36. There were also suggestions wishing to retain the existing electoral arrangements and for a 3-member ward and a 4-member ward.

Cromarty Firth

37. The initial proposals retained the existing Cromarty Firth ward.

38. 4% of respondents commented on the ward, mostly supporting retaining the existing electoral arrangements. There was one suggestion to include rural inland areas of the ward with Edderton because they are linked by the B9176

Tain, Easter Ross and Edderton

39. The initial proposals added Edderton to the existing 3-member Tain and Easter Ross ward to create a more easily identifiable boundary with the Dornoch Firth.

40. 3% of respondents commented on the ward, all were supportive of the proposals except one who felt the proposals did not consider traditional boundaries.

Island wards – Eilean a' Chèo

41. The Commission proposed a 3-member Eilean a' Chèo (Skye) ward, one councillor fewer than at present.

42. 19% commented on the Skye ward and nearly all comments opposed a reduction in councillor numbers because of:

- its size, geography, dispersed communities;
 - distances to travel within the ward and to council offices in Inverness;
 - increased demand on local services from thousands of visitors;
 - socio-economic issues;
 - the same ratio of councillors to electors of 1:800 as the island council areas should be applied; and
 - less representation for Gaelic communities.
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43. Some responses state the Commission has under-estimated the forecast electorate within the Eilean a' Chèo ward. This is discussed later in the paper.
44. One response included a petition with over 1,000 signatures opposing the proposals in Caithness, Sutherland and Skye.
45. A small number of respondents supported less representation on Skye but offered no reasons to support this suggestion.

Island wards – Caol, Mallaig and the Small Isles ward

46. The Commission amended the existing Caol and Mallaig ward name to Caol, Mallaig and the Small Isles.
47. 4% commented on this ward and were generally supportive of the proposals.
48. Two comments suggested adding reference to other communities to the ward name such as Spean Bridge, Roybridge or Invergarry.
49. One respondent suggested a 4-member ward.

Black Isle ward

50. The Commission's proposals made a minor change and reverted to the pre-2017 Black Isle ward boundary, retaining 3 councillors.
51. 3% of all responses commented on this ward. Most responses supported the proposals, two suggested a 2-member ward and one suggested a 4-member ward.

Inverness wards

Inverness North West ward

52. The proposals partly merged two existing Inverness wards to create a 5-member Inverness North West ward with a more easily identifiable boundary, the River Ness.
53. 4% of respondents commented on the ward.
54. Nearly half of the responses suggested creating a 2-member Scorguie and Kinmylies ward and a 3-member Merkinch, Dalneigh and Ballifeary ward. The proposed ward boundary follows the Caledonian Canal and River Ness.
55. Other comments included suggestions to reduce councillor numbers and to rename the ward Inverness Canal.

Inverness North East ward

56. 1% of respondents commented on the proposed ward which partly merged two of the existing Inverness wards to create a 4-member ward.
57. Two responses suggested a 3-member Inverness North East ward and the other response expects the electorate to grow more quickly than the forecasts predict.

Inverness South East ward

58. 3% of respondents commented on the proposed ward which made minor changes to the existing 4-member Inverness South ward.
 59. There was no support for the proposed ward but some comments suggested:
 - less representation;
 - the proposed ward boundary does not consider a new housing development by Culloden;
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- create urban Inverness wards rather than urban–rural Inverness wards; and
- create a Inverness and Culloden ward which considers expected population growth to the east of Inverness.

Inverness South West ward

60. The proposals extended an Inverness ward southwards to include the east–side of the existing Aird and Loch Ness ward.
61. 7% of respondents commented on the proposed ward. Nearly all responses opposed the proposed ward boundary. They stated there are no local ties between urban Inverness and rural communities on the east–side of Loch Ness; increased distances for councillors to travel within the ward; and an expectation that councillors will prioritise constituents in the more populated Inverness area of the ward.
62. Four respondents suggested less representation as either a 3–member or 4–member ward.

Aird ward

63. The Commission’s proposals amended the existing 4–member Aird and Loch Ness ward to create a 3–member ward with the proposed ward boundary following the centre of Loch Ness.
64. 7% of respondents commented on the proposed ward. Nearly all responses opposed the proposed ward boundary. Further comments opposed: less representation for the ward; lack of consideration of the wards size and its geography; the proposed boundary breaks local ties that both sides of Loch Ness share; and a desire for a wider ward boundary by Fort Augustus.
65. One respondent supported the proposals but suggests renaming the ward Aird and North Loch Ness.

Culloden & Ardersier ward

66. The Commission’s proposals amended the ward boundary by Inverness Retail Park and increased representation from a 3 to 4–member ward.
67. 1% commented on this ward. One stated the ward is over–represented and one made an alternative suggestion to extend the ward boundary to the A9 road.

Nairn and Cawdor ward

68. The Commission’s proposals retained the existing Nairn and Cawdor electoral arrangements.
69. 2% commented on this ward with equal support for more, less or the same number of councillors. One comment suggested re–naming the ward Nairnshire because the boundary follows the county boundary.

Badenoch and Strathspey ward

70. The Commission’s proposals retained the existing Badenoch and Strathspey electoral arrangements.
71. Nearly all responses (2%) commenting on this ward supported no change to the existing arrangements. One comment wished to reduce councillors numbers by two.

Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward

72. The Commission's proposals retained the existing Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward boundary and applied special geographical circumstances to retain four councillors.
73. All responses (3%) supported the application of special geographical circumstances and retention of the existing electoral arrangements.

Alternative suggestions

74. The alternative suggestions submitted during the public consultation are discussed below.
75. Most suggestions wished to retain the existing electoral arrangements. There were further suggestions for the Commission to consider special geographical circumstances in Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross and Skye. The Commission could agree to retain the existing electoral arrangements and the Commission is not limited in the number of wards where special geographical circumstances could apply.
76. Consideration of retaining the existing electoral arrangements is discussed later.
77. Some suggestions cannot be considered because they are out-with the legislation for this review. These included: adding Skye to Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area; dividing Highland Council into two or more smaller councils; applying two different ratios of councillors per electors (1:2,800 and 1:800); and using single-member wards throughout the area.
78. There were suggestions to apply the same ratio of councillor to electors as the island councils under review, 1:800. Applying the ratio of 1:800 to Highland Council would result in 230 councillors.
79. There were suggestions to replace the proposed 5-member Inverness North West ward with a 2-member Scorguie and Kinmylies ward and a 3-member Merkinch, Dalneigh and Ballifeary ward. The Inverness North West ward boundary follows the River Ness. The proposed Scorguie and Kinmylies ward and Merkinch, Dalneigh and Ballifeary ward boundary would follow the Caledonian Canal and River Ness to create easily identifiable ward boundaries. The suggestion comes from local councillors and is supported by local community councils and members of the public. The electorate and variation from electoral parity of this suggestion is shown in the table below.

Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity %	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity %
Scorguie and Kinmylies	2	5,617	10.2	6,104	18.2
Ballifeary, Dalneigh, Merkinch	3	8,474	10.8	8,036	3.7

80. A member of the public made an alternative suggestion which considered the Initial Proposals and designed alternative ward boundaries within the historical Inverness district boundary. The suggestion followed community council area boundaries to create urban Inverness wards and a rural ward south of Inverness. Unfortunately the design created a single-member ward south of Inverness, something that is outwith the legislation.
81. One response stated Lochalsh has closer links with Skye than with Wester Ross. From 1999–2007 a Kyle and Sleat ward contained Kyle of Lochalsh on the mainland and the southern tip of Skye. The Commission could consider adding

Kyle of Lochalsh (approx. 600 electors) to Skye to create a 4-member mainland-island Skye ward to improve variation from electoral parity. The Wester Ross and Lochalsh ward would still cover a vast area. There were no other suggestions to amend this ward boundary and most comments supported retaining the existing electoral arrangements. The Skye road bridge opened in 1995.

82. One response suggested amending the Cromarty Firth ward boundary to create a solely coastal ward by transferring rural areas by Ardross to the Tain and Edderton ward. This suggestion would transfer approx. 260 electors. Historically there were single-member wards (such as Ferindonald and Alness and Ardross) which extended from the coast into the hinterland. There were no other suggestions to amend this ward boundary and most comments supported retaining the existing electoral arrangements.
83. There were two suggestions to create a wider ward boundary by Fort Augustus to include a few houses situated just out-with the village. This suggestion would affect approx. 15 electors. The proposed boundary follows the River Tarff but historically a ward boundary has extended beyond Fort Augustus and included Loch Tarff.
84. One response suggested a 3-member Sutherland ward covering the more populated east coast of the county, whilst a 2-member Sutherland ward would cover the more sparsely populated north and west coasts. The electorate and variation from electoral parity of this suggestion is shown in the table below, with a total of 73 councillors. The proposed boundary is based on the existing ward boundary. During the consultation there was opposition to the creation of 2-member wards in other areas because of concerns with proportionality.

Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity %	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity %
North, West and Central Sutherland	2	4,833	-3.9	4,578	-10.1
East Sutherland	3	5,958	-21.0	5,858	-23.3

85. One response made a similar suggestion to create a 2-member Northwest Sutherland and Ullapool ward and a 3-member East Sutherland ward that followed school catchment area boundaries. However their suggestion also partly covered Wester Ross.
86. Some comments opposed the proposed Wester Ross and Lochalsh ward because it splits the Highland Council Wester Ross Area Committee boundary. Highland Council Area Committees are responsible for local service delivery and delegated budgets. There is little information on the Council's website to identify area committee boundaries but their names indicate they may follow existing ward boundaries. The Highland area committees include: Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee; Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Committee; Caithness Committee; City of Inverness Area Committee; Easter Ross Area Committee; Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee; Lochaber Committee; Nairnshire Committee; Sutherland County Committee; and Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee.
87. One response supports the inclusion of Strathpeffer within the proposed Dingwall and Seaforth ward because there are close links within the area such as school catchment areas. However they suggest adding the more rural

Strathconnon area to the neighbouring Wester Ross and Lochalsh ward. This would transfer approx. 250 electors but create an even larger rural Wester Ross and Lochalsh ward.

88. There was a suggestion to split the Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward by adopting Loch Linnhe as a ward boundary. The area to the west of Loch Linnhe would be added to the proposed Caol, Mallaig and Small Isles ward. The Commission considered an option similar to this when developing its initial proposals (Paper 2527, option 3A) but considered that although it followed a more easily identifiable ward boundary, that followed the Great Glen and Loch Linnhe, it proposed significant changes to existing ward boundaries where there would likely be no strong desire to do so.
89. One response supported the proposals but suggested aligning the Caithness–Sutherland ward boundary with historical county or district boundaries which would transfer few electors. The existing Caithness–Sutherland boundary has remained unchanged since 2007. There is a minor deviation from the historical county boundary and the existing ward boundary in an upland area with no roads. There were no other suggestions to amend this boundary.
90. There was a suggestion to adopt dynamic updating when conducting reviews of electoral arrangements. This theory retains ward boundaries but amends the number of councillors for each ward depending on its electorate. An example of dynamic updating is shown in the table below, based on the existing ward boundaries. The most equal electoral parity is achieved with a total 70 councillors, based on the current electorate. A 2–member East Sutherland and Edderton ward offers variation from electoral parity of +19%, forecast at +16%, but a 3–member ward would offer parity of –19%. An adjustment to the East Sutherland and Edderton ward boundary could result in parity within 10% for all wards.

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Ward names

91. The consultation responses mainly opposed the proposals therefore few alternative names were suggested.
92. The Commission may wish to only consider amending ward names if a ward boundary has been amended.
93. The alternative ward name suggestions for the initial proposals included:
- “Landward Caithness” to replace Caithness.
 - The Commission’s Initial Proposals follow the Landward Caithness ward boundary from 2007–2017.
 - “Tain, Edderton, and the Seaboard Villages” to replace Tain, Easter Ross and Edderton.
 - This suggestion creates a lengthy ward name. From 1995–99, “Tain” included Tain and Edderton. From 1999–2007 “Seaboard” included the villages of Shandwick, Balintore and Hilton of Cadboll.
 - “Eilean a’ Chèò and Isle of Raasay” to replace Eilean a’ Chèò.
 - The Eilean a’ Chèò ward contains a total of 8,579 electors, with 158 residing on Raasay.
 - “Caol, Mallaig, Spean Bridge and Roybridge” or “Caol, Mallaig, Invergarry and the Isles” to replace Caol, Mallaig and the Small Isles.
 - The proposed Caol, Mallaig and the Small Isles ward (electorate 7,003) was formerly named Caol and Mallaig but the Small Isles were added to represent the islands of Rum, Muck, Eigg and Canna. Approximately 150 electors reside on the islands of Rum, Muck, Eigg and Canna. Approximately 1,000 electors reside by Spean Bridge and Roybridge. Approximately 1,000 electors reside by Invergarry.
 - “Nairnshire” to replace Nairn and Cawdor.
 - The same ward boundary has been in place since 2007 when the ward was named Nairn. From 2017 the ward was named Nairn and Cawdor.
 - “Inverness Canal” to replace Inverness North West.
 - The name was suggested in conjunction with alternative ward boundaries in Inverness. The Commission adopted compass points for Inverness ward names so may wish to retain the proposed ward names if retaining its initial proposals or may wish to consider alternative ward names if amending its proposals in Inverness. The other ward names suggested included: “Inverness and South Loch Ness”, “Inverness Millburn” and “Inverness Ness-side.”

Electorate forecasts

94. Some responses to the consultation queried the Commission’s 5-year electorate forecasts. The responses highlighted changes in the Eilean a’ Chèò ward from 8,579 electors in 2018 to a forecast electorate of 8,299.
95. Legislation governing electoral reviews states the Commission must have “regard to any change in the number or distribution of electors of a local government
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area likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration, the number calculated by dividing the number of local government electors in each electoral ward of that local government area by the number of councillors to be returned in that ward shall be, as nearly as may be, the same.”

96. The Commission has adopted the same methodology for forecasting electorates since its: 4th Reviews conducted from 2004–2006; 2010 Interim Reviews; and 5th Reviews conducted from 2014–2016.

97. The Commission assessed the accuracy of its electorate forecast methodology from its 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements at its meeting of 17 June 2019 ([Paper 2484](#)). The Commission analysed all 32 council areas and overall 30 council areas were within 5% of the forecasts. The exceptions were Midlothian and Aberdeen. The analysis by ward in Highland council area, from Paper 2484, highlighted that 15 of Highland’s 21 wards were within 5% of the 5th Reviews forecasts. The Eilean a' Chèò ward was within a difference of 3%, with the 5th Reviews over-forecasting the electorate by nearly 300 electors, see table below.

	Ward name	LGBCS 5 th Reviews 5 year forecast (2014–2019)	NRS 2018 Electorate	% electorate difference
10	Eilean a' Chèò	8,867	8,579	-3%

98. Historical comparisons of changes to the electorate are not possible due to changes in the electoral franchise. The Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Act 2015 allowed 16 and 17 year olds to become eligible to vote in local government elections. However it would appear that the electorate of Skye is slowly rising. The NRS electorate shows 8,672 Skye electors in 2017, 8,656 electors in 2018 and 8,872 electors in 2019. Overall the NRS data shows the Highland electorate rising from 184,697 in 2017 to 188,652 in 2019.

99. The Commission’s methodology for forecasting electors considers new build data and electors per dwelling. It then applies a scaling factor based on NRS population forecasts. The raw data shows that the electorate of Skye will increase by 250 electors (8,579 to 8,829) over the next 5 years but the scaling factor which aims to dampen forecast housing developments, and applied to all wards, has reduced this in Skye.

100. The electorate forecasts only show an increase in electorate in seven of the existing 21 wards. The main areas of expected growth are to the south and east of Inverness which includes Tornagrain.

101. Some respondents mentioned an increase in the purchase of rural dwellings during the Covid-19 pandemic but no data is available yet to verify this.

102. The electorate growth across the council area could be lower than expected due to the pandemic and new developments not progressing as quickly as expected in 2020.

103. Highland Council is expected to publish its next Housing Land Audit in May and that document will likely explain the impact of the pandemic on housing developments.

104. Highland Council publishes data on the number of new houses built in Highland per calendar year. Over the past ten years the average number of new houses built per year was approximately 900. In 2020 it was approximately 700.

105. The Commission has the opportunity to address any electorate anomalies and conduct an interim review in 5 years’ time.

Summary

106. The Commission agreed to adopt the same methodology for determining councillor numbers from its 5th Reviews for its island reviews. Strict application of the methodology would result in 66 councillors for Highland Council ($183,541 \div 2,800$) or 67 councillors with a 10% limit on change.
107. The Commission believed a further reduction of councillor numbers since its 5th Reviews would result in significant change within a relatively short period so aimed to retain the 72 councillors arising from the 5th Reviews methodology while addressing variation from electoral parity in Caithness, Sutherland and the Inverness area.
108. The Commission's proposals retained six of the existing 21 ward boundaries.
109. The public consultation resulted in strong opposition to the proposals, specifically in Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross, Skye and elsewhere where there has been change. Those who oppose the proposals wish to retain the existing electoral arrangements.
110. Highland Council, elected representatives, community councils, members of the public, including a petition with over 1,000 signatures oppose the proposals.
111. The only areas where there has been support for the proposals is where there has been no change or minimal change.
112. The opposition is focussed on Caithness, Sutherland and Skye where local electors oppose a reduction in representation in vast rural areas with challenging geography and poor transport links.
113. Comments state that Inverness is gaining representation at the expense of rural areas. In Caithness and Sutherland there were 16 councillors (pre 2017), 14 councillors (post 2017) and the initial proposals have proposed 11 councillors. In Inverness there were 14 councillors (pre 2017), 12 councillors (post 2017) and the initial proposals have proposed 18 councillors. Within a 5-year period Caithness and Sutherland could lose 5 councillors while Inverness gains 4. However about half of Highland's electorate live within the Inverness conurbation area.
114. Other concerns raised during the consultation included: adopting Loch Ness as a ward boundary; forecast electorate projections; proportionality with 2-member wards; and some state the Highland wards are the largest in Europe but it is difficult to accurately compare local government electoral systems and their areas across different countries.
115. The consultation responses contained few alternative suggestions, mostly seeking to retain the existing electoral arrangements.
116. The only support for the proposals was in Inverness where more easily identifiable boundaries were created and in the Black Isle which reverted to an old ward boundary.

Options

117. The Commission is invited to consider which option it wishes to agree as its final recommendations:
 - Option 1 – retain the existing arrangements;
 - Option 2 – retain the initial proposals; or
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- Option 3 – retain the initial proposals with 74 councillors.

118. If the Commission is unable to agree upon one of the above options it could ask the Secretariat to develop a further option or options based on aspects of the responses to the public consultation.

Option 1 – Retain the existing electoral arrangements

119. The public consultation has revealed widespread opposition to the Commission's proposals in the north and west of the council area for both the proposed number of councillors and the proposed ward boundaries.

120. Some respondents stated a preference for retaining the existing electoral arrangements, see Appendix B, rather than the Initial Proposals.

121. The advantages of retaining the existing arrangements are:

- likely supported by Highland Council and a large number of rural communities in Caithness, Sutherland, Ross-shire, Skye and Loch Ness;
- avoids confusion following recent changes to ward boundaries in 2017 and offers recognisable ward boundaries;

122. The disadvantages of retaining the existing arrangements are:

- variation from electoral parity is over 10% in eight wards based on the existing electorate. Forecast variation from electoral parity is over 10% in nine wards. However the forecast electorate could be lower due to the pandemic.
- the North, West and Central Sutherland ward has variation from electoral parity over 30%, although the Commission did consider special geographical circumstances in this remote, rural ward with poor transport links when it conducted its 5th Reviews. The electorate in Caithness and Sutherland is growing but not as rapidly as other areas of Highland.

Option 2 – Initial Proposals

123. The public consultation has resulted in widespread opposition in the north and west of the council area for both the proposed number of councillors and the proposed ward boundaries.

124. The advantages of retaining the Initial Proposals are:

- there was some support during the public consultation for the proposed ward boundaries in Inverness and the Black Isle.

125. The disadvantages of retaining the Initial Proposals are:

- there was widespread opposition to both the proposed number of councillors and ward boundaries in rural areas such as Caithness, Sutherland, Skye, Wester Ross and Loch Ness;
 - a number of responses wished to retain the existing electoral arrangements; and
 - variation from electoral parity is over 10% in seven wards based on the existing electorate. Forecast variation from electoral parity is over 10% in three wards. However the forecast electorate could be lower across the whole council area due to the pandemic.
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Option 3 – Initial Proposals with 74 councillors

126. This option retains the ward boundaries from the Initial Proposals but increases representation in the proposed Skye, Caithness and Sutherland wards and proposes a 3–member Culloden and Ardersier ward.

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity %	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity %
1	Sutherland	5	10791	-13.0	10436	-16.9
2	Caithness	4	8489	-14.4	8046	-19.9
3	Wick	2	5484	10.6	5290	5.3
4	Thurso	2	5925	19.4	5596	11.4
5	Wester Ross and Lochalsh	3	7388	-0.7	7024	-6.8
6	Cromarty Firth	4	9643	-2.8	9529	-5.2
7	Tain, Easter Ross and Edderton	3	7355	-1.2	7083	-6.0
8	Dingwall and Seaforth	5	12178	-1.8	12538	-0.2
9	Black Isle	3	8895	19.5	8683	15.2
10	Eilean a' Chèo	4	8579	-13.5	8299	-17.4
11	Caol, Mallaig and the Small Isles	3	7003	-5.9	7150	-5.2
12	Aird	3	8250	10.9	8187	8.6
13	Inverness North West	5	14091	13.6	14140	12.5
14	Inverness North East	4	10081	1.6	9620	-4.3
15	Inverness South West	5	11250	-9.3	12691	1.0
16	Inverness South East	4	9910	-0.1	9926	-1.2
17	Culloden and Ardersier	3	8521	14.5	11781	56.3
18	Nairn and Cawdor	4	10425	5.1	10047	0.0
19	Badenoch and Strathspey	4	10637	7.2	11310	12.5
20	Fort William and Ardnamurchan	4	8646	-12.9	8567	-14.8
		74	183541		185943	

127. The advantages of Option 3 are:

- it addresses some of the concerns raised during the consultation in Caithness, Sutherland and Skye by increasing representation.

128. The disadvantages of Option 3 are:

- although it addresses representation in Caithness, Sutherland and Skye, it does not consider opposition to the ward boundaries in Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross and Loch Ness. Respondents opposed the proposed urban Thurso and Wick ward boundaries and wished to retain urban–rural wards in Caithness; creation of a large Sutherland ward; and wards which separated communities with common ties on either side of Loch Ness.
- it also fails to consider concerns with a reduction in representation in Wester Ross.
- variation from electoral parity is over 10% in eight wards based on the existing electorate. Variation from electoral is forecast at over 50% in the proposed Culloden and Ardersier ward. However the forecast electorate

may be over-estimated with lower than forecast growth due to the pandemic. According to NRS the Culloden and Ardersier electorate increased from 8,515 in 2019 to 8,517 in 2020.

Recommendations

129. Taking into account all of the evidence arising from the public consultation, the Secretariat invites the Commission to decide for Highland council area whether to:

- to adopt without amendment the Initial Proposals as its Final Recommendations;
- retain the existing electoral arrangements as its Final Recommendations; or
- to make amendments to its Initial Proposals, either councillor numbers or ward boundaries, as its Final Recommendations; or
- amend or retain its proposed ward names.

**Secretariat
March 2021**





