

2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements Final Recommendations for Highland council area

For decision

1. Following discussion of Paper 2553 at its meeting of 11 March 2021, the Commission is invited to further consider Highland council area with particular reference to the electoral arrangements for Caithness and Sutherland.
2. At its meeting of 11 March 2021 the Commission agreed to retain a 3-member Eilean a' Chèo (Skye) ward, as in the Initial Proposals. The Commission noted the opposition to ward and preference that it remain a 4-member ward and considered that given Skye's bridge connection to the mainland that special geographic circumstances would not justify the large variation from electoral parity which would result from a 4-member ward.
3. The Commission also agreed that a 3-member Culloden and Ardersier ward with high forecast electorate growth was acceptable at this time. The impact of Covid on future developments would mean that the forecast growth would likely be achieved over a longer period than anticipated.
4. The Commission asked the Secretariat to further consider options that included: retaining the existing ward boundaries in Caithness and Sutherland; retaining the proposed ward boundaries in Caithness and Sutherland; either 13 or 14 councillors representing Caithness and Sutherland; and some minor ward boundary suggestions submitted during the public consultation.

Electoral arrangements at the start of this review

5. At the start of the review Highland council area was represented by 74 councillors representing 21 wards.
6. 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 A.

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' 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	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

7. 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.
 8. 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).
 9. 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' Chèo; Inverness Central; Culloden and Ardersier; Inverness South; and Fort William and Ardnamurchan.
 10. 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' Chèo 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' Chèo 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' Chèo;
 - 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.
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11. 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 B.

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' Chèò	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	

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

13. Highland Council did not respond to the consultation.

Initial Proposals – Public Consultation

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

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

Summary of responses – Public Consultation

16. 276 responses were received with approx. 240 submitted directly to the consultation site.

17. 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.

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

Key themes

19. 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.

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

Highland Council response

21. 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.

22. 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.

Summary of key themes – representation in Inverness area

23. There was a feeling during the public consultation that urban Inverness was gaining more councillors at the expense of more rural areas but about half of Highland's electorate live within the Inverness conurbation area.

Summary of key themes – Opposition to review and desire to retain existing arrangements

24. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 states the Commission must undertake a review of electoral arrangements in a council area which contains inhabited islands, such as Highland. When undertaking a review the Commission has to consider electoral parity so some change is likely.

Summary of key themes – ratio of electors per councillor

25. Some responses to the consultation suggested a different ratio of electors per councillor for urban and rural areas. The Commission cannot offer different ratios within a council area due to the legislative requirement it works under.

Summary of key themes – Eilean a' Chèo (Skye)

26. The Commission considered that given Skye's bridge connection to the mainland that special geographic circumstances would not justify the large variation from electoral parity which would result from a 4-member ward.

Summary of key themes – Aird (Loch Ness)

27. Responses to the consultation on both sides of Loch Ness opposed the proposed ward boundary that followed the centre of Loch Ness. They stated there are close ties on either side of Loch Ness but the proposals create a more easily identifiable ward boundary.

Summary of key themes – Wester Ross and Lochalsh

28. Responses to the consultation opposed the proposed ward boundary that transferred Strathpeffer from the existing 4-member Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh ward to create a 3-member Wester Ross and Lochalsh ward. The proposals maintain variation from parity within the ward and there was some support for placing Strathpeffer within a Dingwall ward. The proposals may break Highland area committee boundaries but the Council could re-align these with ward boundaries.

Summary of key themes – Caithness/ Sutherland wards

29. 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.

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

31. 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 25,025 electors in 2019. The electorate constantly fluctuates with electors joining the register for electoral events before dropping off the register again.

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

33. 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.

34. 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.

Alternative Suggestions – Caithness and Sutherland

35. The following options consider alternative electoral arrangements for Caithness and Sutherland.

Caithness and Sutherland Option 1 – proposed boundaries with 12 councillors

36. Caithness and Sutherland Option 1 retains the Commission’s Initial Proposals but proposes a 5-member Sutherland ward, increasing the number of councillors representing Caithness and Sutherland by one. This option also proposes a 3-member Culloden and Ardersier ward with a total for the council area of 72 councillors.

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity %	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity %
1	Sutherland	5	10,791	-15.3	10,436	-19.2
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
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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, 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	3	8,521	11.4	11,781	52.1
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	

37. The advantage is that there will be some support for the increased representation in Caithness and Sutherland. Only four wards proposed have forecast variation from electoral parity over 10%.

38. The disadvantage is that there was opposition to the proposed Caithness and Sutherland ward boundaries and a desire to retain the existing electoral arrangements in the area.

Caithness and Sutherland Option 2 – existing boundaries with 14 councillors

39. Caithness and Sutherland Option 2 retains the existing number of councillors in Caithness and Sutherland. It proposes a minor ward boundary change by Edderton, the same as the Initial Proposals. Approximately 300 electors reside in Edderton and the proposed ward boundary follows the Dornoch Firth to create a more recognisable ward boundary.

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	3	5,958	-19.9	5,858	-22.3
5	Wester Ross and Lochalsh	3	7,388	-0.7	7,024	-6.8
6	Cromarty Firth	4	9,643	-2.8	9,529	-5.2
7	Tain, Easter Ross and Edderton	3	7,355	-1.2	7,083	-6.0
8	Dingwall and Seaforth	5	12,178	-1.8	12,538	-0.2
9	Black Isle	3	8,895	19.5	8,683	15.2
10	Eilean a' Chèò	3	8,579	15.3	8,299	10.1
11	Caol, Mallaig and the Small Isles	3	7,003	-5.9	7,150	-5.2
12	Aird	3	8,250	10.9	8,187	8.6
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15	Inverness South West	5	11,250	-9.3	12,691	1.0
16	Inverness South East	4	9,910	-0.1	9,926	-1.2
17	Culloden and Ardersier	3	8,521	14.5	11,781	56.3
18	Nairn and Cawdor	4	10,425	5.1	10,047	0.0
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	

40. The advantage is there will likely be support for the proposals in Caithness and Sutherland which retain 14 councillors within the area.

41. The disadvantages are: forecast variation from electoral parity is nearly -40% in the North, West and Central Sutherland ward.

Caithness and Sutherland Option 3 – existing boundaries with 13 councillors

42. Caithness and Sutherland Option 3 is similar to Option 2 but proposes a 2-member North, West and Central Sutherland ward.

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	-3.9	4,578	-10.1
2	Thurso and Northwest Caithness	4	10,083	0.3	9,543	-6.3
3	Wick and East Caithness	4	9,815	-2.4	9,389	-7.8
4	East Sutherland	3	5,958	-21.0	5,858	-23.3
5	Wester Ross and Lochalsh	3	7,388	-2.1	7,024	-8.1
6	Cromarty Firth	4	9,643	-4.1	9,529	-6.5
7	Tain, Easter Ross and Edderton	3	7,355	-2.5	7,083	-7.3
8	Dingwall and Seaforth	5	12,178	-3.1	12,538	-1.6
9	Black Isle	3	8,895	17.9	8,683	13.6
10	Eilean a' Chèò	3	8,579	13.7	8,299	8.6
11	Caol, Mallaig and the Small Isles	3	7,003	-7.2	7,150	-6.4
12	Aird	3	8,250	9.4	8,187	7.1
13	Inverness North West	5	14,091	12.1	14,140	11.0
14	Inverness North East	4	10,081	0.2	9,620	-5.6
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16	Inverness South East	4	9,910	-1.5	9,926	-2.6
17	Culloden and Ardersier	3	8,521	13.0	11,781	54.2
18	Nairn and Cawdor	4	10,425	3.7	10,047	-1.4
19	Badenoch and Strathspey	4	10,637	5.8	11,310	11.0
20	Fort William and Ardnamurchan	4	8,646	-14.0	8,567	-15.9
		73	183,541		185,943	

43. The advantages are there will likely be support for retaining the existing ward boundaries in Caithness and Sutherland. It offers more equal variation from electoral parity based on the existing electorate. Option 3 proposes seven wards with parity over 10%.

44. The disadvantage is that there was a desire to retain the existing number of councillors in the area.

45. Although the Commission agreed a 3-member Eilean a' Chèò (Skye) ward and 3-member Culloden and Ardersier ward at its meeting of 11 March 2021, the table below shows that Option 3 with a 4-member Culloden and Ardersier ward offers similar variation from electoral parity with either 73 or 74 councillors.

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	-2.6	4,578	-8.9
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

Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland

LGBCS Paper 2557

4	East Sutherland	3	5,958	-19.9	5,858	-22.3
5	Wester Ross and Lochalsh	3	7,388	-0.7	7,024	-6.8
6	Cromarty Firth	4	9,643	-2.8	9,529	-5.2
7	Tain, Easter Ross and Edderton	3	7,355	-1.2	7,083	-6.0
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Alternative Suggestion – Inverness

47. Cllr Ross and Cllr Graham both suggested replacing 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. They believe it would improve local ties and create a recognisable boundary, the canal. This suggestion is supported by Muirtown Community Council, Inverness West Community Council and two members of the public

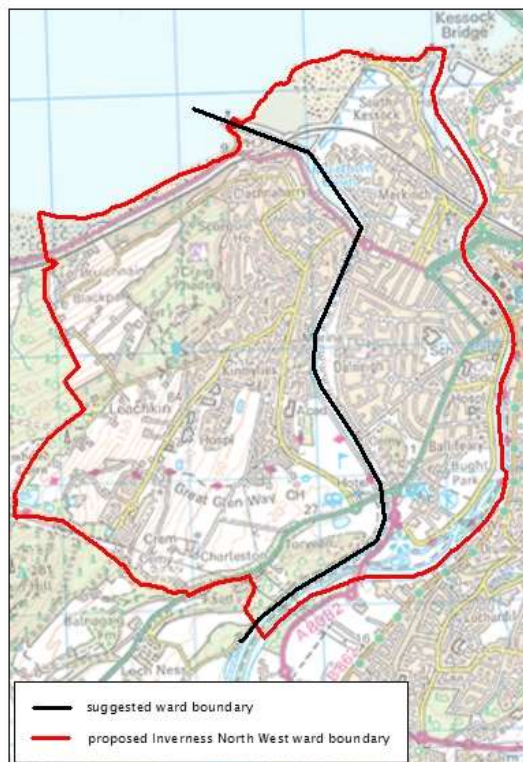
48. The proposed Inverness North West ward boundary follows the River Ness, see map below. The suggested Scorguie and Kinmylies ward and Merkinch, Dalneigh and Ballifeary ward boundary would follow the Caledonian Canal and River Ness to create easily identifiable ward boundaries. The electorate and variation 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

49. The Commission proposed a 5–member Inverness North West with variation from electorate parity of +10.6%, forecast to +9.5%.

50. This suggestion creates easily identifiable ward boundaries that follow the River Ness and Caledonian Canal. However there was some opposition to this suggestion from councillors in the neighbouring Inverness North East ward and forecast variation from electoral parity is +18%.

51. Councillors from the neighbouring Inverness ward opposed this suggestion.



Alternative Suggestion – Lochalsh

52. A member of the public 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, see map below. The Commission could consider adding Kyle of Lochalsh with approx. 600 electors to Skye but this would worsen variation from electoral parity in a 3-member mainland–island Skye ward. The table below shows variation from electoral parity for these two wards. There were no other suggestions to amend this ward boundary. Most comments supported retaining the existing electoral arrangements, a 4-member Eilean a' Chèò ward. The Skye road bridge opened in 1995.

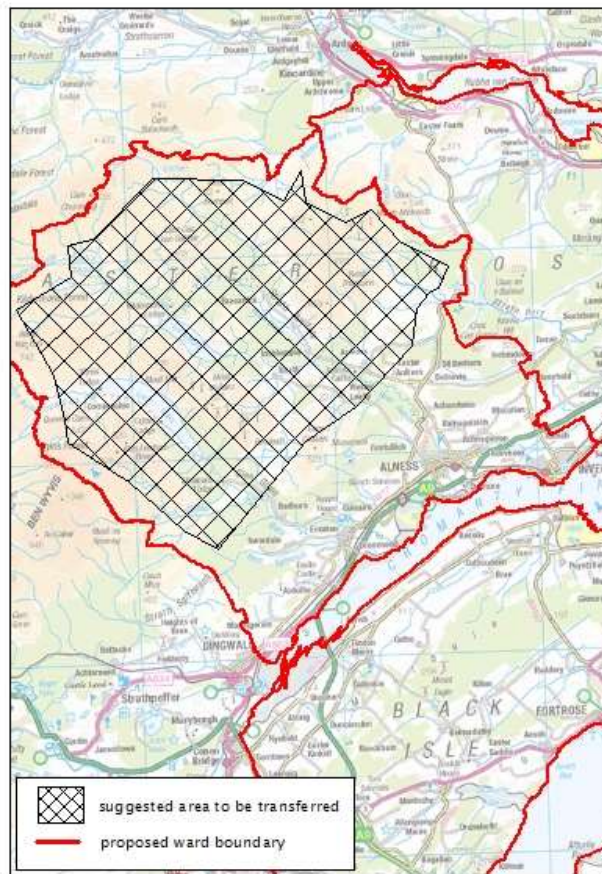
Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity %	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity %
5	Wester Ross and Lochalsh	3	6,788	-11.2	6,424	-17.1
10	Eilean a' Chèò	3	9,179	20.0	8,899	14.9



Alternative Suggestion – Cromarty Firth

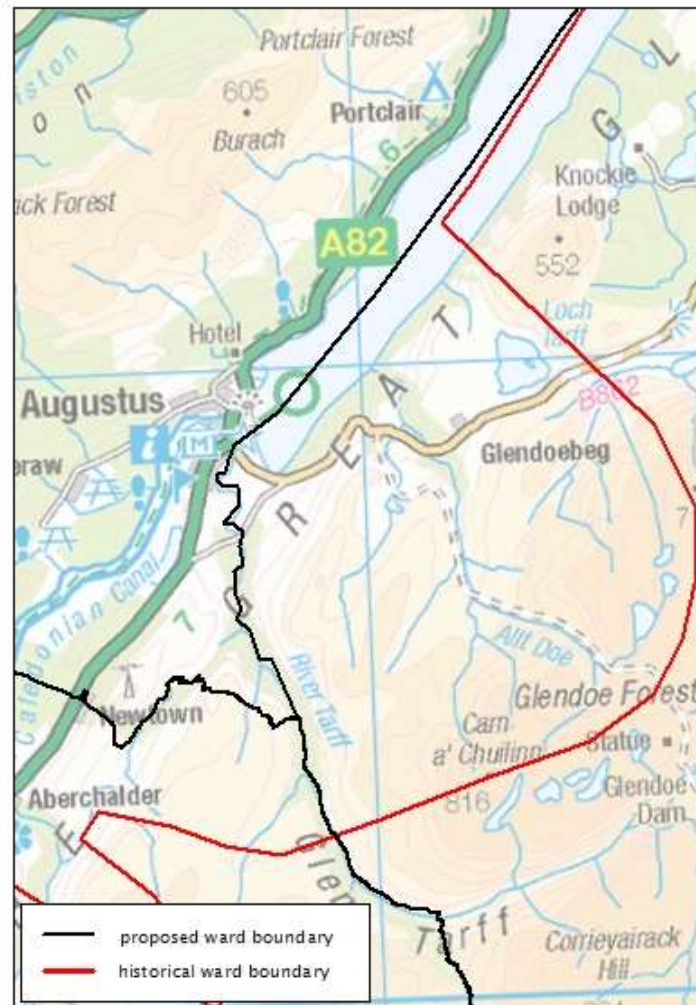
53. A member of the public suggested amending the Cromarty Firth ward boundary to create a solely coastal ward by transferring rural areas by Ardross to the Tain and Edderton ward. This suggestion would transfer approximately 260 electors, (see shaded area on map below). Historically single-member wards (such as Ferindonald or Alness and Ardross) have extended from the coast to the hinterland. There has not been a solely coastal ward in this area in the past 25 years. There were no other suggestions to amend this ward boundary and most comments supported retaining the existing electoral arrangements.

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity %	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity %
6	Cromarty Firth	4	9,383	-8.0	9,269	-10.3
7	Tain, Easter Ross and Edderton	3	7,615	-0.4	7,343	-5.2



Alternative Suggestion – Fort Augustus

54. Two members of the public suggested a wider ward boundary by Fort Augustus to include a few houses situated just out-with the village. Both suggested the boundary should follow a historical ward boundary. The suggestion would affect approx. 15 electors and make only a minor difference to variation from electoral parity. A map of the proposed ward boundary and historical ward boundary by Fort Augustus is shown in the map below.



Alternative Suggestion – Knoydart

55. In the Highland Council response a councillor suggested amending the existing ward boundary between Caol and Mallaig (highlighted below) and Wester Ross and Lochalsh to avoid dividing Knoydart. The proposed ward boundary would follow Loch Hourn. There are fewer than 10 electors to the south of Loch Hourn and this suggestion would make only a minor difference to variation from electoral parity. The existing ward boundary in this area has remained unchanged since 2007. Historically Knoydart has been divided between wards. From 1995 to 2007 a Lochalsh ward followed a similar boundary to the existing ward boundary. A map of the suggested ward boundary and existing ward boundary is shown in the map below.



Alternative Suggestion – Cairngorm National Park

56. In the Highland Council response a councillor suggested aligning ward boundaries with the Cairngorm National Park boundary. The Cairngorm National Park partly covers Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland, Moray, and Perth and Kinross council areas. Within Highland council area the Cairngorm National Park covers part of the Badenoch and Strathspey ward and the existing Aird and Loch Ness ward. The Commission's proposals could align with the Cairngorm National Park, the small area of upland to the North of Laggan contains no electors.

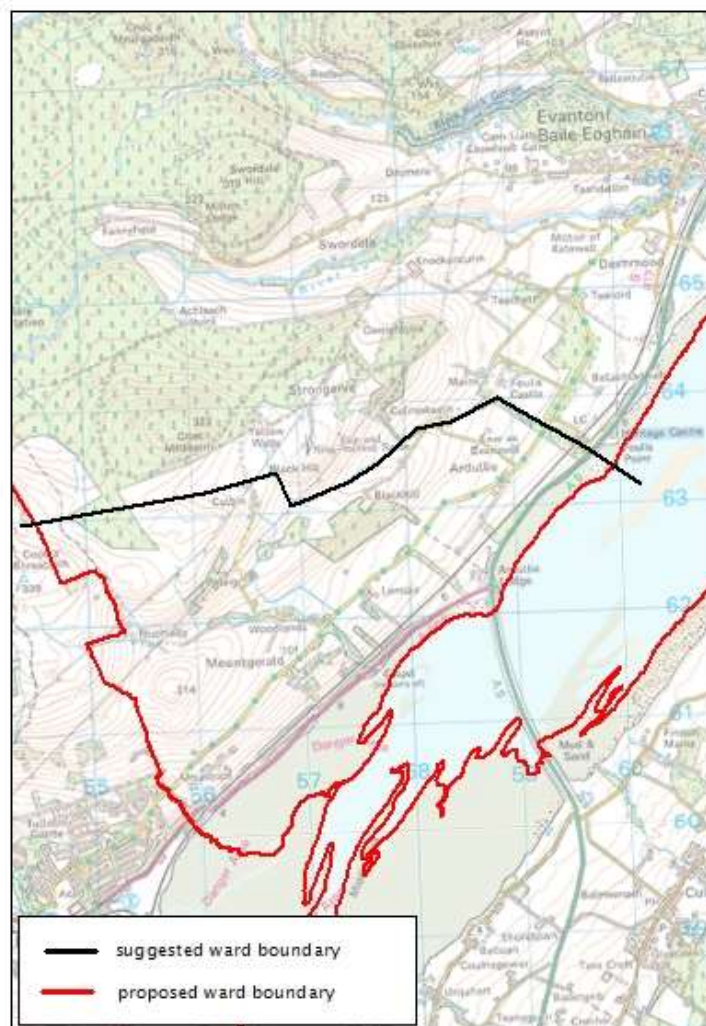


Alternative Suggestion – Cromarty ward

57. In the Highland Council response a councillor suggested extending the Dingwall and Seaforth ward boundary northwards to follow the Foulis Burn, including Mountgerald with approximately 120 electors.

58. The existing ward boundary in this area has remained unchanged since 1995 with Mountgerald situated in wards with Evanton to the north rather than with Dingwall. This suggestion with so few electors would have minimal effect on variation from electoral parity. See table and map below.

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity %	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity %
6	Cromarty Firth	4	9,523	-6.6	9,409	-8.9
8	Dingwall and Seaforth	5	12,298	-3.5	12,658	-2.0



Alternative Suggestion – Tain ward

59. In the Highland Council response a councillor was content with Edderton returning to a Tain ward but suggested amending the southern Tain ward boundary to follow the Balnagown River to align with school catchment boundaries. This suggestion would transfer approx. 1,000 electors by Barbaraville, Pollo and Kilmuir.
60. The existing ward boundary between the Tain and Cromarty Firth wards is unchanged since 2007.
61. Historically Barbaraville has been included in a ward with communities to both the north and to the south of it. From 1995 Barbaraville was situated in a Fearn ward which extended northwards along the coastline. From 1999 Barbaraville was situated within a Rosskeen and Saltburn ward which included Barbaraville with half of Invergordon.
62. The table below shows variation from electoral parity of transferring approx. 1,000 electors by Barbaraville from a Tain ward to a Cromarty Firth ward:

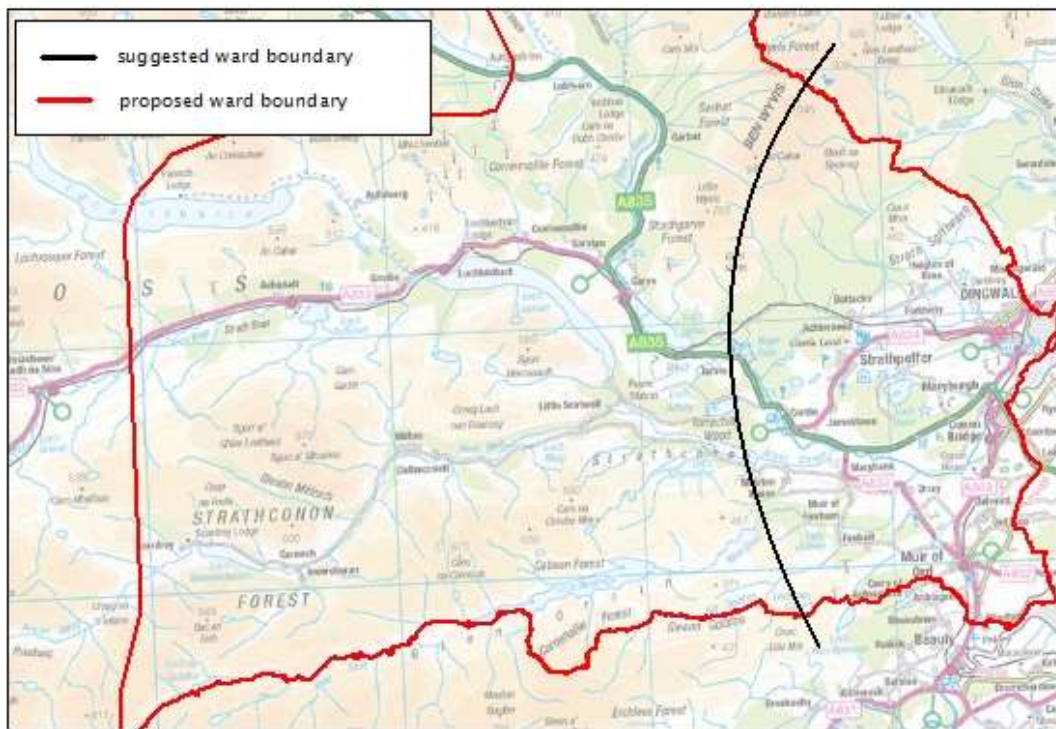
Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity %	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity %
6	Cromarty Firth	4	10,643	4.4	10,529	1.9
7	Tain, Easter Ross and Edderton	3	6,355	-16.9	6,083	-21.5



Alternative Suggestion – Dingwall and Seaforth ward

63. A member of the public supported 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 suggested adding the more rural Strathconon area to the neighbouring Wester Ross and Lochalsh ward. This would transfer approximately 300 electors but create an even larger rural Wester Ross and Lochalsh ward.

Ward No.	Ward Name	Cllrs	Electorate (Dec 2018)	Current Variation from Parity %	Forecast Electorate (2024)	Forecast Variation from Parity %
5	Wester Ross and Lochalsh	3	7,688	0.5	7,324	-5.5
8	Dingwall and Seaforth	5	11,878	-6.8	12,238	-5.2



Highland Council response to public consultation

64. Highland Council's response to the consultation, included feedback and comments from individual councillors on the proposals. The Councillor's comments are shown in the table below, with notes from the Secretariat.

Ward		Highland Councillor comments	Secretariat notes
2	Thurso and Northwest Caithness	Retain two 4 member wards	Suggestion to revert to existing Caithness electoral arrangements. Discussed in this paper, both Caithness and Sutherland Option 2 and Option 3 retain two 4-member Caithness wards.
3	Wick and East Caithness		
1	North, West and Central Sutherland	Edderton should remain with Sutherland and two 3-member wards is required to cover.	See Tain, both support and opposition for Edderton boundary. Suggestion to revert to existing Sutherland electoral arrangements is discussed in this paper, see Caithness and Sutherland Option 2.
4	East Sutherland and Edderton		
5	Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	Retain the full ward and its 4 members	See Dingwall, both support and opposition for Strathpeffer boundary.
6	Cromarty Firth	Boundary should be moved to include Barbaraville as it is associated with Invergordon. Southern boundary should be amended to Foulis Burn.	Both suggestions discussed in paper. Foulis Burn (Mountgerald) transfers fewer electors in comparison with Barbaraville suggestion.
7	Tain and Easter Ross	Content with Edderton returning to the Ward but south boundary should move to the Balnagown River to ensure School catchment areas are in the correct ward	This is similar to the Tain suggestion discussed in the paper with suggestion to amend ward boundary by Barbaraville.
8	Dingwall and Seaforth	Agree with Strathpeffer returning to Dingwall and the Black Isle being restored. Also agreed with Cromarty Firth that the boundary with them should be moved North to the Foulis Burn.	Foulis Burn suggestion discussed in paper as alternative suggestion – Cromarty ward, transfers few electors
9	Black Isle	Content with proposed boundary for Black Isle and 3-member ward.	Initial Proposals reverted to previous Black Isle ward boundary (2007 – 2017).

Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland

LGBCS Paper 2557

10	Eilean a' Chèò	Retain current 4-member ward.	Initial Proposals proposed a 3-member ward with mass opposition during public consultation.
12	Aird and Loch Ness	Retain existing ward boundary with other side of Loch Ness and 4-member ward	Initial Proposals split existing ward by following centre of Loch Ness and proposed a 3-member ward with large number of responses opposing proposal during public consultation.
13	Inverness West	Propose dividing the new Inverness North West ward into a 3-member Ballifeary and Dalneigh ward and 2-member Scorguie and Kinmylies ward. Align with school catchment and community council boundaries using the canal as the boundary.	Suggestion discussed in paper. See Inverness Central comments below opposing this suggestion.
14	Inverness Central	Members agree on the new boundary of the Ness River as a sensible boundary with Inverness North East. They were not in agreement with Inverness West about creating two wards of 3 and 2 and felt the 5-member single ward better served the area.	
15	Inverness Ness-side	The large rural area to the South along Loch Ness should revert to Aird & Loch Ness Ward	Similar to Aird and Loch Ness comments.
16	Inverness Millburn	The new boundary reflected the town centre better and was an improvement on the previous boundary. The boundary with Culloden and Ardersier was also an improvement	
17	Culloden and Ardersier	Content with new boundary which reverts to previous ward and provision of extra councilor.	Initial Proposals made a minor change to ward boundary by Inverness Business Park and proposed a 4-member ward due to expected electorate growth. Commission to agree 3-member ward.
18	Nairn and Cawdor	Content that Nairn is unchanged.	

19	Inverness South	Content with the proposed level of representation and with the boundaries for the Inverness South Ward	
20	Badenoch and Strathspey	Content with no change in the ward but wished to suggest a small amendment to the boundary with Aird & Loch Ness to align with the cairngorm National Park.	Minor amendment discussed in paper.
11	Caol and Mallaig	Suggest that the north Boundary of Ward 11 should be moved to include the remainder of the Knoydart peninsula along to Kinloch Hourn. Concerned that the Small Isles are not being treated under the Islands Act and consideration of a single member ward could be created but not at the reduction of the Caol & Mallaig Ward.	Knoydart suggestion is discussed in paper. A single member Small Isles ward would offer variation from electoral parity of -94%.

Ward names

65. The consultation responses mainly opposed the proposals therefore few alternative names were suggested.

66. The Commission may wish to only consider amending ward names if a ward boundary has been amended.

67. 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.
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- “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.”

Summary

68. In Caithness and Sutherland, three alternative options have been discussed.
69. Caithness and Sutherland Option 1 retains the Commission’s Initial Proposals but proposes a 5-member Sutherland ward but there was opposition to the proposed Caithness and Sutherland ward boundaries and a desire to retain the existing electoral arrangements in the area.
70. Caithness and Sutherland Option 2 retains the existing ward boundaries and councillor numbers which will likely be supported but the North, West and Central Sutherland ward offers forecast variation from electoral parity of nearly – 40%.
71. Caithness and Sutherland Option 3 retains the existing ward boundaries but with a 2-member North, West and Central Sutherland ward. There was a desire to retain the existing electoral arrangements in the area.
72. Caithness and Sutherland Option 3 proposes seven wards with parity over 10%. Option 1 proposes nine wards with parity over 10% and Option 2 proposes eight wards with parity over 10%.
73. A number of alternative suggestions have been presented in the paper but there was no strong support for any of these suggestions.
74. The ward boundaries by the Caithness–Sutherland county boundary; Lochalsh; Cromarty Firth; Knoydart; Cairngorm National Park; Cromarty; and Tain have been in place since 2007 and there were no suggestions to amend these ward boundaries during the 5th Reviews. The suggestions by Lochalsh and Tain (Barbaraville) worsen variation from electoral parity. The other suggestions make minor changes to recognised boundaries.
75. There were alternative suggestions based on the Commission’s Initial Proposals. The Fort Augustus suggestion may address splitting local community ties in a rural area with minimal impact on variation from electoral parity. The suggestion in Inverness North West does not improve variation from electoral parity. The suggestion by Strathpeffer between the Dingwall and Seaforth ward and Wester Ross and Lochalsh ward creates an even larger rural Wester Ross and Lochalsh ward.
76. Most comments received during the public consultation wished to retain the existing electoral arrangements.
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Recommendations

77. 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 make amendments to its Initial Proposals in Caithness, Sutherland and whether to adopt any additional alternative suggestions, as its Final Recommendations; and
- amend or retain its proposed ward names.

Secretariat
April 2021



