

2032 Reviews

Methodology for determining councillor numbers

For discussion

1. At its 21 July 2025 meeting the Commission considered [Paper BS184 Future Reviews of Electoral Arrangements](#) and asked the Secretariat to provide further analysis and information on its methodology for determining councillor numbers for the 2032 Reviews.
2. The Commission is invited to consider the methodologies it applied for previous reviews, those used by other Commissions as well as other approaches that could be adopted and agree if it wishes to consult with stakeholders on any of these ahead of its 2032 Reviews.

Previous methodologies

3. The Third Reviews methodology for determining councillor numbers categorised each council area into seven categories with a ratio of councillors to electors based on:
 - large and small cities.
 - island authorities.
 - population density (persons per hectare); and the proportion of the population in settlements of more than 10,000.
 - no council should have fewer than 18 or more than 80 members. See Appendix A.
4. The Fourth Reviews retained the same number of councillors for each council area and merged the existing single-member wards into 3 or 4-member wards.
5. Prior to the Fifth Reviews, the Commission consulted stakeholders on how it should determine councillor numbers, see [Paper 2172](#) from our archived website.
6. The responses to the consultation generally indicated:
 - no widespread support for significant increase or decrease in councillor numbers.
 - support for a categorisation of councils to be used to set a ratio of electors to councillors for all councils in that category.
 - support for a reduction in the number of categories from the seven used previously by the Commission.
 - suggestions of various factors to be used in a transparent methodology for categorising councils which share common characteristics.
 - support for minimum and maximum council sizes.
7. The Fifth Reviews methodology for determining councillor numbers categorised each council area into five categories with a ratio of councillors to electors based on:
 - percentage of the population living out-with settlements of 3,000 or more and a percentage of the population living in the most deprived areas.
 - no council should have fewer than 18 or more than 85 members.
 - a 10% limit on change of councillor numbers applied. See Appendix A.

Other UK methodologies

8. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) and Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru (DBCC) conduct electoral reviews under broadly similar rules to Boundaries Scotland with an overall aim of effective and convenient local government.
9. LGBCE operate a constant rolling programme of electoral reviews. All councils are reviewed periodically but reviews can also be triggered when there is wide electoral disparity or when a council requests a review.
 - councils provide the number of councillors they require and LGBCE analyse that number with the 'Nearest Neighbours model' prepared and published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), now infoshareplus.
 - they do not have a minimum or maximum number of councillors but generally recommend between 30 and 100.
 - occasionally they recommend a large change in councillor numbers but they do not apply a cap on change. Most reviews result in a change of two or three councillor numbers.
10. For further information, LGBCE have published a technical guidance document for their electoral reviews – https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/technical-guidance-october_2024.pdf.
11. DBCC have scheduled a rolling programme of electoral reviews. Their methodology includes:
 - minimum and maximum council size (between 30 and 75 members, except Cardiff).
 - population density (calculated by dividing population by area).
 - Councils with 10-20% of their areas in the most deprived 20% of LSOAs (lower layer super output area) receive one additional councillor. Councils with more than 20% receive two additional councillors.
 - Councils with 40-75% of their built-up areas (BUAs) under 10,000 people receive one additional councillor. Councils with more than 75% receive two additional councillors.
 - a 10% limit on change of councillor numbers is applied.
 - each council is allocated a range of number of councillors. Councils are asked to provide their preferred number of councillors within this range.
12. For further information DBCC have published a Policy and Practice document for their electoral reviews – <https://www.dbcc.gov.wales/reviews/05-25/electoral-reviews-policy-and-practice-2025>

Alternative approaches

13. The Secretariat have searched to see how other organisations group councils in Scotland but there are few examples that cover all of Scotland, except for the Improvement Service. There are local examples such as the Ayrshire Shared Services Committee (East, North and South Ayrshire Councils) or Aberdeen City Region Deal Joint Committee (Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils) but nothing Scotland-wide.

Improvement Service - Family Groups

14. The Improvement Service have published two family groups of councils, each divided into four groups of eight councils. One group is for people services (children, social work, housing) while the other is for environmental, culture and leisure, economic development, corporate, property and tackling climate change. These family groups are used by both councils for benchmarking as well as other public bodies such as Audit Scotland. Appendix B shows the two Improvement Service family groups.
15. Four variables were found to be of primary importance in developing the groups:
- Social context: as measured by the average SIMD percentile of the local authority population (larger numbers imply more affluent populations).
 - Poverty: as measured by the proportion of people who are income deprived in each local authority (larger numbers imply more deprived populations).
 - Population dispersion: as measured by the GAE (grant aided expenditure) indicator for population dispersion (larger numbers imply more geographically dispersed populations).
 - Demands arising from urban density: as measured by the GAE indicator for cars/km of road (larger numbers imply a greater burden on services and infrastructure, e.g. roads).
16. There are some notable differences between each grouping. The people services grouping (children, social work, housing) places cities such as Aberdeen and Edinburgh with Orkney and Shetland in group 1 and Dundee and Glasgow with the Western Isles in group 4. The people services grouping is based on deprivation and affluence, while the other grouping is based on rurality.
17. The Improvement Service family group variables have some similarities to the Commission's 5th Reviews methodology as it categorises council areas by both deprivation and population density data. DBCC also use deprivation and population density data in their methodology for determining councillor numbers.

Other approaches

18. The Commission had suggested researching the Scottish Government's recently published Public Service Reform Strategy or Health and Social Care Renewal Framework where there is more focus on communities.
19. The Secretariat have searched extensively and found many individual case studies but no Scotland-wide approach which could be applied.
20. The Commission could devise a methodology which includes community councils but the activity and number of community councils varies widely across the country and it would be challenging to apply a consistent approach.
21. A sample of community councils across six council areas is shown in the table below. It shows a wide variance in the number of community councils in Scottish cities (Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow) in comparison with more rural areas such as Highland and Dumfries and Galloway.
22. There are generally more community councils in rural areas than urban areas, therefore a rurality or density factor could be applied and would return a similar outcome.

Council area	Electorate (Dec. 2024)	Number active cc's	Number inactive cc's	Electors per CC
Dumfries and Galloway	117,552	75	0/ not given	1,567
Dundee	114,115	3	14	38,038
Edinburgh	406,064	41	6	9,904
Glasgow	455,451	74	19	6,155
Highland	187,845	128	0/ not given	1,468
West Lothian	150,579	33	7	4,563

Councillor numbers

23. Scottish Ministers had indicated that prior to the Fifth Reviews they would find it difficult to justify an increase in the overall number of councillors in Scotland.

24. The Commission will wish to confirm with Scottish Ministers whether there is likely to be any Local Government reform and any potential impact on councillor numbers ahead of the 2032 Reviews.

Consultation on methodology

25. As mentioned earlier, in 2011 three years prior to the Fifth Reviews commencing, the Commission consulted stakeholders on how it should determine councillor numbers.

26. The questions asked during that consultation were

- Do institutional and cultural changes since 1996 suggest that for Scotland as a whole there should be more or fewer councillors from 2017 onwards?
- Should there be a minimum for councillor numbers in any local authority, and if so what should it be?
- Should there be a maximum for councillor numbers in any local authority, and if so what should it be?
- Should the Commission continue to apply a uniform, transparent and objective methodology for determining councillor numbers?
- What factors, in addition to electorate per councillor, are relevant in determining councillor numbers?
- Should councillor numbers be determined differently for different categories of local authorities and, if so, what factors should be used to define those categories?
- Are there any other factors which are relevant to the Commission's consideration of councillor numbers?

27. The Commission may wish to conduct a consultation and include: various possible approaches using previous methodologies; discuss the methodologies used by LGBCE, DBCC and the Improvement Service; or ask stakeholders for alternative suggestions.

Summary

28. This paper describes the methodologies adopted by the Commission for previous reviews and those used by DBCC and LGBCE. It also provides details of a grouping of council areas devised by the Improvement Service.

29. Boundaries Scotland, DBCC and Improvement Service have all categorised councils by using deprivation and rurality data. LGBCE use CIPFA/ infoshareplus nearest neighbour data but this is not produced for Scottish councils.

30. There is no consistent Scotland wide community data available which could be incorporated in the 2032 Review methodology.
31. The Commission is asked to consider if it wishes to consult with stakeholders in 2026 on its approach for the 2032 Reviews. The consultation could discuss previous methodologies used and possible new methodologies as well as ask for alternative suggestions. If the Commission agrees it wishes to consult with stakeholders, the Secretariat will prepare a draft document for discussion at a later meeting.

Secretariat
September 2025

Appendix A – 3rd and 5th Reviews methodology for determining councillor numbers

Third Reviews: Council categories and councillor: elector ratios			
Category	Description	Ratio	Council areas
1	Large Cities (Edinburgh, Glasgow)	1:6,000	Edinburgh; Glasgow City
2	Cities (Aberdeen, Dundee)	1:4,000	Aberdeen; Dundee
3	Authorities with less than 60% of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons AND an overall population density of one person or more per hectare	1:3,500	Clackmannanshire; East Dunbartonshire; East Renfrewshire; Falkirk; Fife; Inverclyde; Midlothian; North Ayrshire; North Lanarkshire; Renfrewshire; South Lanarkshire; West Dunbartonshire; West Lothian
4	Authorities with EITHER 60% or more of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons OR an overall population density of less than one person per hectare	1:3,000	Angus; East Ayrshire; East Lothian; South Ayrshire; Stirling
5	Authorities with 60% or more of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons AND an overall population density of less than one person per hectare	1:2,500	Aberdeenshire; Dumfries and Galloway; Moray; Perth and Kinross; Scottish Borders
6	Authorities with 60% or more of the population living outwith settlements of 10,000 or more persons AND an overall population density of less than 0.2 persons per hectare	1:2,000	Argyll and Bute; Highland
7	Island authorities (Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands)	1:750	Na h-Eileanan an Iar; Orkney Islands; Shetland Islands

Fifth Reviews: Council categories and councillor : elector ratios			
Category	Criteria used to classify councils	Ratio	Council areas
1	Less than 30% of the population living out-with settlements of 3,000 or more AND 30% or more of the population living in the most deprived areas	2,800	Glasgow City; Inverclyde
2	Less than 30% of the population living out-with settlements of 3,000 or more AND 15% or more and less than 30% of the population living in the most deprived areas	3,000	Clackmannanshire; Dundee City; East Ayrshire; North Ayrshire; North Lanarkshire; Renfrewshire; West Dunbartonshire
3	Less than 30% of the population living out-with settlements of 3,000 or more AND less than 15% of the population living in the most deprived areas	3,800	Aberdeen City; Angus; City of Edinburgh; East Dunbartonshire; East Lothian; East Renfrewshire; Falkirk; Fife; Midlothian; South Ayrshire; South Lanarkshire; West Lothian
4	30% or more and less than 60% of the population living out-with settlements of 3,000 or more AND less than 15% of the population living in the most deprived areas	2,800	Aberdeenshire; Argyll and Bute; Dumfries and Galloway; Highland; Moray; Perth and Kinross; Scottish Borders; Stirling
5	60% or more of the population living out-with settlements of 3,000 or more AND less than 15% of the population living in the most deprived areas	800	Na h-Eileanan an Iar; Orkney Islands; Shetland Islands

Appendix B – Improvement Service Family Groups

Family Groupings for Children, Social Work and Housing indicators

These councils are grouped by the type of population they serve, e.g. level of deprivation and affluence.

Family Group 1	Family Group 2	Family Group 3	Family Group 4
East Renfrewshire	Moray	Falkirk	Eilean Siar
East Dunbartonshire	Stirling	Dumfries & Galloway	Dundee City
Aberdeenshire	East Lothian	Fife	East Ayrshire
Edinburgh, City of	Angus	South Ayrshire	North Ayrshire
Perth & Kinross	Scottish Borders	West Lothian	North Lanarkshire
Aberdeen City	Highland	South Lanarkshire	Inverclyde
Shetland Islands	Argyll & Bute	Renfrewshire	West Dunbartonshire
Orkney Islands	Midlothian	Clackmannanshire	Glasgow City

Family Groupings for Environmental, Culture & Leisure, Economic Development, Corporate, Property and Tackling Climate Change indicators

These councils are grouped by the type of area they serve, e.g. rural, semi-rural and urban.

Family Group 1	Family Group 2	Family Group 3	Family Group 4
Eilean Siar	Perth & Kinross	Angus	North Lanarkshire
Argyll & Bute	Stirling	Clackmannanshire	Falkirk
Shetland Islands	Moray	Midlothian	East Dunbartonshire
Highland	South Ayrshire	South Lanarkshire	Aberdeen City
Orkney Islands	East Ayrshire	Inverclyde	Edinburgh, City of
Scottish Borders	East Lothian	Renfrewshire	West Dunbartonshire
Dumfries & Galloway	North Ayrshire	West Lothian	Dundee City
Aberdeenshire	Fife	East Renfrewshire	Glasgow City

Source - <https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/how-do-we-compare-councils>