



Information Paper

Local government electoral arrangements in Scotland: 1995 onwards

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Boundaries Scotland, formerly the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland, was established by the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, with responsibility for keeping under review local government areas and electoral arrangements in Scotland. Under the terms of Schedule 8 of the Scotland Act 2016, responsibility for reviews of Scottish Parliament boundaries passed from the Boundary Commission for Scotland to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland with effect from 18 May 2017. Section 28 of the Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020 renamed the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland as Boundaries Scotland and came into force on 14 May 2021.

The Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994 created the 32 single-tier local government areas that cover Scotland.

Each local government area is divided for electoral purposes into wards. Appendix A lists the number of wards and councillors for each local government area since its inception.

When the local government areas were first established, the Secretary of State for Scotland made a series of Directions on 8 November 1994 which defined electoral wards for each local government area. In general, these were wards we recommended for District Councils in our Second Statutory Reviews of Electoral Arrangements, conducted between 1989 and 1994. Since in most cases the new local government areas covered the area of a number of complete preceding District Councils, the use of these wards for the new local government areas was straightforward. In those cases where the new local government areas did not align with previous council or ward boundaries (Angus, Argyll and Bute, Dundee City, East Dunbartonshire, Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire, Perth and Kinross, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire) the Directions defined wards for the areas where it was not possible to use the wards we had recommended. For Highland Council, the Direction defined wards that were combinations of the preceding District Wards.

The resulting wards were used for the initial elections to the new councils in 1995, with a total of 1,245 electoral wards defined across the 32 local government areas, with each ward returning one councillor. The first elections took place on 6 April 1995, with the councils assuming their responsibilities from 1 April 1996.

During the period from 1996 to 1998, we completed our Third Statutory Reviews of Electoral Arrangements for each local government area. Those Reviews included the determination of the appropriate number of councillors for each local government area, using a methodology that took into account population and area. As a result, the number of councillors on some councils changed significantly, with reductions of more than 20% in Dumfries and Galloway; Orkney; and Scottish Borders, and increases of more than 20% in Aberdeenshire; Clackmannanshire; East Lothian; Moray; and Perth and Kinross. The number of wards across Scotland reduced as a result of those reviews to 1,222, each returning one councillor. The wards resulting from those reviews were used for local government elections in May 1999 and May 2003.

The Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 introduced multi-member wards for Scottish local government, with each ward returning either 3 or 4 councillors. As a result of the passage of that Act, we conducted our Fourth Statutory Reviews of

Electoral Arrangements between 2004 and 2006 to make recommendations for the necessary wards. As a result of the Fourth Statutory Reviews, the number of councillors on each council remained the same, but since each ward returned 3 or 4 councillors, the number of wards reduced considerably to 353 across Scotland. The first elections using these new wards took place on 3 May 2007.

In 2010, we completed a series of Interim Reviews of electoral arrangements of the local government areas. As a result, one change was made, which was to increase the number of councillors in West Lothian council by one, but not to change the boundaries of any wards.

We completed our Fifth Statutory Reviews of Electoral Arrangements, between 2014 and 2016, for each local government area. Our methodology for determining councillor numbers took into account population size, population distribution and socio-economic conditions in each council area. We maintained a minimum number of councillors at 18 but raised the maximum limit from 80 to 85. A cap on change in councillor numbers was set at 10%. Scottish Ministers accepted our recommendations in 27 council areas, partly due to the forthcoming Islands (Scotland) Act. The first elections using these new wards took place on 4 May 2017.

Section 20 of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 required us to undertake a review of electoral arrangements for each local government area with an inhabited island, these included: Argyll and Bute Council; Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; Highland Council; North Ayrshire Council; Orkney Islands Council; and Shetland Islands Council. The Act described an inhabited island as being surrounded on all sides by the sea. The Islands Act allowed us to consider 1 or 2-member wards if they contained inhabited islands. During these reviews we considered the imminent Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020 which permitted 2 or 5-member wards for the mainland. Scottish Ministers accepted our recommendations in four of these council areas. The first elections using these new wards took place on 5 May 2022.

Amendments are also made to electoral wards whenever a local government area boundary is modified as a result of one of our administrative area boundary reviews.

Appendix A – Numbers of wards and councillors by local government area

The tables below list the number of electoral wards and councillors for each local government area since its inception.

The full text of the Directions by the Secretary of State, Statutory Notices and reports by the Commission which resulted in the definition of these electoral wards is available on our website.

Local government area	1995 wards/cllrs	1999 wards/cllrs	2007		2017		2022	
			Wards	Cllrs	Wards	Cllrs	Wards	Cllrs
Aberdeen City	50	43	13	43	13	45	13	45
Aberdeenshire	47	68	19	68	19	70	19	70
Angus	26	29	8	29	8	28	8	28
Argyll and Bute	33	36	11	36	11	36	11	36
Clackmannanshire	12	18	5	18	5	18	5	18
Dumfries and Galloway	70	47	13	47	12	43	12	43
Dundee City	36	29	8	29	8	29	8	29
East Ayrshire	30	32	9	32	9	32	9	32
East Dunbartonshire	26	24	8	24	7	22	7	22
East Lothian	18	23	7	23	6	22	6	22
East Renfrewshire	20	20	6	20	5	18	5	18
Edinburgh, City of	58	58	17	58	17	63	17	63
Eileanan an Iar, Na h-	30	31	9	31	9	31	11	29
Falkirk	36	32	9	32	9	30	9	30
Fife	92	78	23	78	22	75	22	75
Glasgow City	83	79	21	79	23	85	23	85
Highland	72	80	22	80	21	74	21	74
Inverclyde	20	20	6	20	7	22	7	22
Midlothian	15	18	6	18	6	18	6	18
Moray	18	26	8	26	8	26	8	26
North Ayrshire	30	30	8	30	10	33	9	33
North Lanarkshire	69	70	20	70	21	77	21	77
Orkney Islands	28	21	6	21	6	21	6	21
Perth and Kinross	32	41	12	41	12	40	12	40
Renfrewshire	40	40	11	40	12	43	12	43
Scottish Borders	58	34	11	34	11	34	11	34
Shetland Islands	26	22	7	22	7	22	7	23
South Ayrshire	25	30	8	30	8	28	8	28
South Lanarkshire	74	67	20	67	20	64	20	64
Stirling	22	22	7	22	7	23	7	23
West Dunbartonshire	22	22	6	22	6	22	6	22
West Lothian	27	32	9	32*	9	33	9	33
Scotland total	1,245	1,222	353	1,222	354	1,227	355	1,226

* Number of councillors in West Lothian council was increased to 33 from 2012 elections and the overall total increased to 1223 from 2012.