

BS 213B – Research Follow up paper

1. Commissioners considered paper BS 213 at the 29 January meeting and requested further detail about potential areas of research to be carried out before the 2032 electoral reviews.
2. There are three key stages of decision making during an electoral review: -
 - (a) Agreeing the methodology
 - using population distribution and SIMD
 - calculating the 5-year forecast
 - agreeing minimum and maximum size of Council
 - applying 10% change rules
 - (b) Recommending councillor numbers
 - electoral parity
 - recommending 1-5 (island) or 2-5 (mainland) member wards
 - (c) Recommending the number and boundaries of wards
 - electoral parity
 - local ties
 - applying special geographic considerations
3. Commissioners also have an obligation to “take such steps as it thinks fit for seeing that persons who may be interested in the review are informed” (S18(2)(b)).
4. The Commission agreed that research would assist with strengthening understanding of how its decision-making can impact Councillors’ workload and therefore Council effectiveness. The Commission is not seeking to influence any rules changes or challenge any of the existing rules.

Understanding Councillors’ workload
<i>Aim: try and strengthen understanding of which aspects of the Commission’s decision-making process has the most impact on Councillor workload. Try and understand how councillor workload differs across different types of local authorities</i>
Areas of research
Particular focus on impact of remoteness, geography, and population sparsity and impact on councillor workload and service delivery.
Examination of limitations of current classification tools (e.g., SIMD and urban-rural classifications) for rural deprivation.
Impact of different types of multi member ward on workload.
Potential impact of political alignment in multi-member wards on how councillors work and coordinate, and the impact it has on independent councillor workloads.
Testing the assumption that post Covid, more work is online rather than in person. Does online engagement increase or decrease Councillor workload?

Which factors contribute to effective and local government?
<i>Aim: try and strengthen the understanding of how the factors the Commission has decision making powers over contribute to effective and convenient local government</i>
what does meaningful community look like to the public in the context of ward designs?
what is the optimum size for a Council and what factors should be considered when recommending councillor numbers?
18-85 range is the current range- is there any evidence to support this assumption?
What impact does a 1, 2-, 3-, 4-, or 5-member ward have on effective and convenient local government.
Understanding what good engagement looks like
<i>Aim: to try and improve the engagement process and the quality of consultation responses</i>
what does best practice look like?
understanding approach of other Commissions and what would work for electoral reviews. Balance between digital and other forms of engagement.
Best practice for engaging with marginalised groups such as prisoners, mental health patients, homeless, travelling communities and others.
How to involve community development groups with improving engagement.

Proposed approach

5. Commissioners are asked to consider the following proposed approach and provide their views:

- **Stage 1:** desk-based literature review of current research with a particular focus on councillor workload and what factors impact effective and convenient local government.
Proposed approach: externally commissioned via “quick quote” procurement route.
- **Stage 2:** After considering the literature review and the Aberdeen University’s ‘Defenders of Local Democracy’ research (once published), the Commission can discuss and agree where there are ‘gaps’ and where commissioning further research would be beneficial.
Proposed approach: commission external research potentially via extension of Aberdeen University’s research. If the contract is over £50k, procurement process likely to take 3-4 months.
- **Stage 3:** Research in best practice for engagement during boundary reviews and how to reach marginalised groups.
Proposed approach: Explore at UK Commissions’ meeting possibility of undertaking joint research.

- **Stage 4:** Assessing accuracy of approach taken to 5-year forecasting
Proposed approach: Internal research comparing forecasts with actual electoral growth for both 5th Reviews and Islands Reviews.