

Agenda Item	20
Report No	HC/15/14

Local Government Boundary Commission - Review of Councillor Numbers

Report by the Chief Executive

SUMMARY

The Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland has published its initial proposals for councillor numbers for each of Scotland's 32 Council. For Highland Council, the Commission has proposed that number of councillors reduces from 80 to 72 Members

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland has published its initial proposals for Councillor numbers for each of Scotland's 32 Council on 29 May 2014. For Highland Council, the Commission has proposed that number of Councillors reduces from 80 to 72 Members. The Commission has invited comments on its proposals and the period of public consultation lasts for 12 weeks, concluding on 21 August.
- 1.2 The results of the review will be in place for the next Local Government Election in May 2017.

2.0 THE COMMISSION'S APPROACH

- 2.1 At earlier Reviews, Commission used a formulaic approach (as in the Third and Fourth Review which concluded in 1998 and 2006 respectively) to determining the number of councillors, taking into account the population density and distribution of a council area. In this Review, the Commission has determined councillor numbers by categorising each council based on deprivation and population distribution.
- 2.2 In March this year, Senior Elected Members met with representatives of the Commission and indicated that members were generally content with the proposal to reduce the number of Highland Councillors from the current 80 to 72. The Council's response to the Commission forms the Appendix to this Report.
- 2.3 The Commission has recognized that Wards with high levels of deprivation tend to produce a higher workload for councillors. Members were therefore keen to see the proposals implemented in such a way that

constituents in those Wards in Highland that have high levels of deprivation were not adversely affected by any reduction in representation, which would increase the workload for the remaining Councillors.

- 2.4 In this review, Wards must contain 3 or 4 members, as required by legislation. Details of the configuration of Wards will be considered at the next stage of the Review. When reviewing electoral arrangements the Commission is required to take account of the following factors:
- The interests of effective and convenient local government;
 - Within each council, each councillor should represent the same number of electors as nearly as may be;
 - Local ties which would be broken by making a particular boundary;
 - The desirability of fixing boundaries that are easily identifiable; and
 - Special geographical considerations.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Council
- (i) Notes the proposals from the Local Government Boundary Commission and the response from Highland Council and
 - (ii) Notes the public consultation process which is currently underway and the opportunity for members of the public and individual Members to make representations on the proposals.

Signature:

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 17 June 2014

Author: John Bruce, Elections Manager

Background Papers:– LGBCS letter of 27 May 2014



Mr Ronnie Hinds
Chair
Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland
Thistle House
91 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5HD

Your Ref:
Our Ref: CE/SB/JB
Date: 16 April, 2014

Dear Mr Hinds

Fifth Reviews of Electoral Arrangements

I refer to the meeting between senior elected members of the Council and representatives from the Commission in Inverness on 5 March, 2014 where we discussed the Commission's proposals for the number of elected members for the Highland Council.

As indicated at that meeting, members were generally content with the proposal to reduce the number of Highland Councillors from the current 80 to 72.

However as you will appreciate the Highland Council area is geographically and demographically complex. It has a mix of fast growing urban areas as well as geographically large and remotely populated areas.

As the Commission has recognised, Wards with high levels of deprivation tend to produce a higher workload for Councillors. Members were therefore keen to see the proposals implemented in such a way that constituents in those Wards in Highland that have high levels of deprivation were not adversely affected by any reduction in representation, which would increase the workload for the remaining Councillors.

With regard to rural and sparsely populated areas in the Highlands, while Members understood the Commission's desire not to exceed 15% from parity in determining Ward electorates; it would be the case that adhering to that objective in Highland would create geographically larger wards than exist at present. For example North West and Central Sutherland ward is some 4,867 square kilometres and is currently 25% below parity. Increasing the size of these wards would have implications for those Councillors in terms of effectively representing their constituents and also for the constituents being able to access their local Councillors.

Members felt there was a case for adopting a more flexible approach on parity which recognised the unique factors facing the large rural wards in the Highlands.

An alternative option would be to amend the ratio of councillors to electors. Currently the Commission has allocated the Highland Council to category three with 2,800 electorates per councillor, giving a total hypothetical electorate for Highland of 201,600. However the actual electorate for Highland is 183,187 and therefore if the ratio was reduced to 2,600 it would not only better reflect the actual numbers of electorate in Highland, including provision for population growth, but would also reduce the geographical size of the large and remotely populated wards.

I would be happy to discuss this further with you if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely

Steve Barron
Chief Executive