



Highland Council Area

Introduction

1. Highland Council area currently comprises 3 county constituencies. The electorates of the 3 constituencies at the start and finish of the previous and current reviews are provided at Appendix C.

Initial Considerations

2. In forming our initial proposals for Highland Council area, we had in mind the following considerations:

2.1 At the enumeration date of June 2001, Highland Council area contained 163,867 parliamentary electors, giving the Council area a theoretical entitlement of 2.3 seats.

2.2 In terms of geographical size, Highland Council area has the 3 largest constituencies in Scotland.

2.3 In considering our wider review of constituencies in Scotland, we had earlier examined the possibility of combining Highland Council area wards 35-39 (largely the Isle of Skye but including a small part of the mainland around Kyle of Lochalsh) with Na h-Eileanan an Iar Council area to form an enlarged Western Isles constituency. However, a similar proposal made at the time of the Third Periodical Review was rejected following a local inquiry. We concluded that arguments against the proposal which were made at the local inquiry in 1981 remained as strong now as they were at that time. Accordingly, we did not further pursue this possibility.

3. We recognised that it would not be practicable, for geographical reasons, to design 2 constituencies within Highland Council area. We resolved, therefore, that Highland Council area should continue to comprise 3 constituencies.

4. We noted that, whilst there were considerable disparities between the electorates of the existing constituencies, the land areas were broadly comparable, ranging between 32 per cent and 35 per cent of the total area. We also noted that the town of Inverness was currently split between 2 constituencies and that the existing Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber constituency covered 33 per cent of the Council area with approximately 66,900 electors, compared with 41,200 and 56,300 electors in the existing Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, and Ross, Skye and Lochaber constituencies respectively.

5. We concluded, therefore, that we should consider the possibility of creating a constituency that contained all the contiguous built-up area of Inverness and closely approximated the electoral quota. In view of the substantial increase in the electoral quota, we believed that such a constituency might not be dissimilar in terms of geographical size from constituencies comprising an urban/rural mix of electorate in other parts of Scotland. Further, we considered that, although the geographical size of the remaining 2 constituencies in Highland Council area would remain substantially larger than other mainland constituencies, the revised electorates would be significantly below the electoral quota and that a better balance between the electorates might be achieved.

6. We considered a number of options, but concluded that the wards in the existing Ross, Skye and Inverness West constituency, which either converged on or were contained within the town of Inverness, together with the wards lying immediately to the east and south of Inverness, offered the best solution in terms of both electorate and geography for a constituency which incorporated all of the contiguous built-up area of Inverness. To restore a balance between the electorate in the remainder of the Council area, we transferred an area around Evanton and Alness from the existing Ross, Skye and Inverness West constituency to the existing Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross constituency to form a new Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross constituency. To form the proposed Ross, Skye and Lochaber constituency, the remainder of the existing Ross, Skye and Inverness West constituency was complemented by the addition of wards 73-80 which formed the southernmost extremity of the existing Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber constituency in the area of Fort William, Glencoe, Moidart, Morvern and Ardnamurchan.

Provisional Proposals

7. On 7 February 2002 we published our provisional proposals for 3 county constituencies for Highland Council area as follows:

Constituencies	Comprising	Electorate (June 2001)
Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross CC	Electoral wards in Highland Council area	
	1 Caithness North West	1,870
	2 Thurso West	2,033
	3 Thurso Central	2,064
	4 Thurso East	2,024
	5 Caithness Central	2,118
	6 Caithness North East	1,983
	7 Wick	2,049
	8 Wick West	2,049
	9 Pulteneytown	1,935
	10 Caithness South East	1,932
	11 Sutherland North West	1,628
	12 Tongue and Farr	1,245
	13 Sutherland Central	1,941

14	Golspie and Rogart	1,685
15	Brora	2,124
16	Dornoch Firth	2,194
18	Alness and Ardross	2,279
19	Tain West	2,177
20	Tain East	2,019
21	Seaboard	2,042
22	Invergordon	2,176
23	Rosskeen and Saltburn	2,489
26	Ferindonald	2,477
	Total	46,533

Inverness and Badenoch CC

Electoral wards in Highland Council area

42	Kirkhill	2,464
43	Scorguie	2,313
44	Muirtown	2,167
45	Merkinch	2,095
46	Inverness Central	2,238
47	Culloden	2,336
48	Ardersier, Croy and Petty	2,231
49	Loch Ness West	2,128
50	Inverness West	2,079
51	Canal	2,178
52	Ballifeary	2,225
53	Lochardil	2,251
54	Hilton	2,115
55	Milton	2,249
56	Crown	2,388
57	Raigmore	1,909
58	Loch Ness East	2,087
59	Culduthel	2,585
60	Inshes	2,150
61	Drumossie	2,498
62	Westhill and Smithton	2,319
63	Balloch	2,415
64	Nairn Alltan	2,199
65	Nairn Ninian	2,291
66	Nairn Cawdor	2,138
67	Nairn Auldearn	2,210
68	Badenoch West	1,685
69	Badenoch East	1,825
70	Strathspey South	2,040
71	Strathspey North East	2,084
72	Grantown on Spey	1,898
	Total	67,790

Ross, Skye and Lochaber CC	Electoral wards in Highland Council area	
	17 Lochbroom	1,712
	24 Gairloch	1,747
	25 Lochcarron	1,502
	27 Strathpeffer and Strathconon	1,972
	28 Dingwall South	1,848
	29 Dingwall North	2,382
	30 Muir of Ord	2,319
	31 Conon and Maryburgh	2,326
	32 Knockbain and Killearnan	2,168
	33 Black Isle North	2,241
	34 Avoch Fortrose	2,722
	35 Snizort and Trotternish	1,751
	36 Skye West	1,547
	37 Portree	1,753
	38 Skye Central	1,509
	39 Kyle and Sleat	1,661
	40 Kinlochshiel	1,440
	41 Beauly and Strathglass	1,967
	73 Mallaig and Small Isles	1,479
	74 Kilmallie and Invergarry	1,755
	75 Claggan and Glen Spean	1,625
	76 Ardnamurchan and Morvern	1,607
	77 Caol	2,383
	78 Fort William North	2,028
	79 Fort William South	1,821
	80 Glencoe	2,279
	Total	49,544

Representations on Provisional Proposals

8. During the statutory consultation period, we received 79 representations regarding our provisional proposals for Highland Council area.

9. Our proposals were supported by 57 representations, although the majority, including Highland Council, David Stewart MP, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, and Inverness East and Nairn Liberal Democrats, requested that “Nairn” should form part of the proposed Inverness and Badenoch constituency name.

10. Inverness West Scottish National Party contended that our proposals could not be justified. Alternatively, it proposed that Lochaber remain in the current constituency of Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber and that the urban area of Inverness remain split, moving wards north and west of the River Ness into the present Ross, Skye and Inverness West

constituency. A further 11 representations supported this alternative. Lochbroom and Coigach Branch Scottish National Party considered that our proposals for Highland Council area were unnecessary and 3 representations considered that there was no justification for increasing the size of Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross constituency.

11. Four representations objected to the proposed Ross, Skye and Lochaber constituency on the grounds that it was geographically too large. Additionally, the Rt Hon Charles Kennedy MP commented that, although he did not oppose our proposals, he considered that the sheer size of the constituency would create unique challenges for whoever represented it.

12. Kiltarlity Community Council submitted a representation expressing concern that, under our proposals, Kiltarlity Community Council area was divided between the proposed Ross, Skye and Lochaber constituency and Inverness and Badenoch constituency.

13. Following the end of the statutory consultation period, we received 2 further representations. The Scottish Labour Party supported our proposals for constituency boundaries in Highland Council area but requested that “Nairn” be included in the name of the proposed Inverness and Badenoch constituency. The second representation objected to our proposals.

Consideration of Representations on Provisional Proposals

14. We noted that Highland Council did not object to the boundaries set out in our provisional proposals, although it indicated that the proposed Inverness East and Lochaber constituency should be renamed “Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey”. We noted also that the majority of representations supported our proposals but asked that “Nairn” be included in the name of the proposed Inverness and Badenoch constituency. We agreed that the number and nature of the representations objecting to our proposals did not justify a local inquiry.

15. We considered the counter-proposals submitted by Inverness West Scottish National Party. We were, however, mindful that the majority of representations, including that from Highland Council, supported the boundaries set out in our provisional proposals. We concluded that, if we were to adopt the counter-proposal, it would be necessary to split ward 46 (Inverness Central) or allocate this town centre ward to either a revised Inverness West or Inverness East constituency. Our general policy is that whole wards should form the building blocks for revised constituencies. We agreed, therefore, that ward 46 should not be split between 2 constituencies. Recognising the general support for the boundaries we proposed, we also agreed that we should not revise our provisional proposals in line with the counter-proposals offered by Inverness West Scottish National Party.

16. With regard to the 3 representations specifically concerning Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross constituency, we noted there had been no significant demand to maintain the existing constituency boundaries. Further, in light of our proposals for a constituency which contained all of the town of Inverness, we took the view that our provisional proposals for the remainder of Highland Council area offered a better balance of electorate between the two rural constituencies.

17. In considering the representation from Kiltarlity Community Council, we noted that the boundaries for Community Council areas are determined by Councils in consultation with local communities and, as such, are subject to change from time-to-time. In addition, to incorporate all of Kiltarlity Community Council area within a single constituency would require splitting a ward between 2 constituencies. In view of our general policy regarding the use of whole wards as building blocks for constituencies, we decided that we should not adjust our provisional proposals.

18. We therefore decided that the boundaries for the constituencies set out in our provisional proposals for Highland Council area should not be amended. However, in light of the representations received regarding the omission of “Nairn” from the proposed Inverness and Badenoch constituency name, we agreed to amend the name of that constituency to “Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey”, as proposed by Highland Council.

Publication of Revised Recommendations

19. On 23 October 2003 we published our revised recommendations adopting the name “Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey”. Following publication of our revised recommendations, no representations were received.

Final Recommendations

20. On 11 December 2003 we announced that we were making no changes to our revised recommendations for 3 county constituencies covering Highland Council area and that these were our final recommendations.

21. We accordingly recommend the adoption of our proposals for 3 county constituencies for Highland Council area, as set out in paragraph 7 above, subject only to changing the name of Inverness and Badenoch county constituency to Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey county constituency.

