

AGENDA ITEM

10

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT
BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR
SCOTLAND: FIFTH REVIEW OF
ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS**

FALKIRK COUNCIL

**Subject: LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR
SCOTLAND: FIFTH REVIEW OF ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS**
Meeting: FALKIRK COUNCIL
Date: 22 JUNE 2016
Author: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is to bring to the attention of Council the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's recommendations following their Fifth Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland ("the Commission") is established under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 ("the Act") and is required to conduct a review of electoral arrangements in each council area at intervals of 8 to 12 years. The Commission's last review was completed in 2006 and preparation for its fifth review was started in 2014.

2.2 The Commission's proposals for Falkirk were published in March 2015 and were reported to Council on 27 May 2015. A copy of that report is available at <http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/coins/submissiondocuments.asp?submissionid=11015>

2.3 In summary, the proposals left wards 1 (Bo'ness and Blackness), 3 (Denny and Banknock), 5 (Bonnybridge and Larbert), 8 (Lower Braes) and 9 (Upper Braes) unchanged but with changes suggested for the other 4 wards.

2.4 For wards 2 (Grangemouth) and 4 (Carse, Kinnaird and Tryst), it was proposed that the village of Skinflats would be moved from the former to the latter with Grangemouth then becoming a 3 rather than a 4 member ward.

2.5 For wards 6 (Falkirk North) and 7 (Falkirk South), the proposal was to adjust the boundary between them with Camelon moving from ward 7 to ward 6, while the town centre and Callendar Park areas to the south of the Stirling and Edinburgh railway line would move from ward 6 to ward 7. Ward 7 would also reduce from a 4 member to a 3 member ward.

2.6 Having considered the proposals at the meeting in May 2015, Council decided to reject them and to request that the status quo should prevail, with one minor exception by way of addressing a boundary anomaly affecting a handful of voters in wards 4 and 5.

- 2.7 The Commission considered the Council's response at its meeting on 7 July 2015 but, apart from making the small change requested in wards 4 and 5, made no further adjustment to the proposals which were then issued for public consultation during the period 30 July to 22 October 2015. It is understood that seven responses (generally against the proposals) were submitted to the Commission during this period. The responses are accessible on the Commission's website. While the Commission considered them at its meeting on 12 January 2016, it nevertheless decided that its original proposals should not be altered and that there was no need for further consultation nor a public inquiry.
- 2.8 The Commission's final recommendations are therefore that the number of councillors in the Falkirk Council area should reduce from 32 to 30 with the corresponding amendments to ward boundaries, all as outlined in the report to the Scottish Ministers attached as an appendix to this report.
- 2.9 In accordance with section 17 of the Act, it now rests with the Scottish Ministers to determine whether to make an order giving effect to the proposals, either as submitted or with modifications. No order can, however, be made before the expiry of a period of 6 weeks from submission.

3. METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The Act authorises the Commission, when carrying out a review of electoral arrangements, to make proposals for effecting changes that appear to it to be desirable in the interests of effective and convenient local government. In doing so, it must adhere to the following rules:
- having regard to any change in the number and distribution of electors over the following 5 years, the number of electors per councillor in each ward shall be, as nearly as may be, the same;
 - subject to that proviso, regard shall be had to:
 - the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable;
 - any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular boundary, with this criterion being given the greater weight in any conflict between the two.
- 3.2 In previous reviews, the Commission's methodology for determining councillor numbers was mainly based on population. While that remained a key determinant of the current review, population dispersal and the socio-economic characteristics of the area were also factored in, in particular information derived from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) index data sets.
- 3.3 It will be recalled from the previous report to Council that concern had been expressed by a number of Councils about this methodology and the consequences of it at a national and local level. This concern was supported by COSLA on a cross party basis. Meetings have been held between COSLA and the Commission to discuss the concerns further and COSLA also wrote to and met with the (then) Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment about it. COSLA pointed to the fundamental concerns emerging from local government about the

lack of a clear and comprehensive methodology, the singling out of deprivation as a factor without considering a broad range of other factors, that its introduction as a factor had not been identified at the start of the process and hadn't been consulted upon and, moreover, that the objective for which it was introduced had not been followed through at a ward level because of the need to secure electoral parity. It is understood that discussions between COSLA and the Minister were constructive.

- 3.4 COSLA has advised that the Commission's final report will be considered at the Convention meeting due to take place on 24 June and that, in the meantime, a letter has been drafted for issue to the new Minister for Local Government and Housing seeking urgent clarification of the Government's plans to respond to the Commission's recommendations. COSLA has also reiterated the decision of the Convention taken in October 2015, namely that it:
- re-affirmed its view that any link between councillor numbers and deprivation must be evidenced;
 - agreed that COSLA continue to seek to influence the Local Government Boundary Commission;
 - agreed that the change COSLA would ideally seek is a clear, comprehensive and evidence based review;
 - agreed that if such a shift was not possible at this stage, the focus of effort should be shifted to working with Ministers to seek a satisfactory solution for those Councils who were unhappy with the process and that the Presidential team and Group Leaders be authorised to undertake those discussions on Convention's behalf;
 - noted that COSLA believed that Local Government boundaries should be determined by Local Government itself, within reasonable parameters, agreed with national government, to meet local needs and thus empower communities.

- 3.5 Reference to the Commission's review in the Local Governance section of the SNP manifesto for the recent Scottish Parliamentary elections to the effect that "*following the report of the independent review of local government ward boundaries we will protect local communities by taking forward changes only where communities have been adequately respected in the new proposed arrangements*" has also been perceived as indicating a willingness to take on board concerns being expressed across a number of councils about the procedure adopted by the Commission and the outcome of its review.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The Commission now having completed its work, the next steps rest with the Scottish Ministers and principally with the Minister for Local Government and Housing. He may, if he thinks fit, give effect to the Commission's proposals either as they have been submitted to him or with modifications. The earliest that could be done is 6 weeks after the proposals were submitted to him i.e. not before 7 July.
- 4.2 It remains available to Council to lobby the Minister on the proposals before him either individually and/or together with COSLA. COSLA has also sought an indication from its Council members of their views of the published proposals and if they have a preferred course of action.

4.3 While it is understood that some other Councils adversely affected by the Commission's proposals are retaining the option of judicial review, it is being seen as a last resort with a degree of confidence being placed in constructive communication at ministerial level.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 It is recommended that Council:

- (i) notes the final recommendations of the Fifth Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements as they affect the Falkirk area, and
- (ii) determines what response it wants to make to those recommendations



.....
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

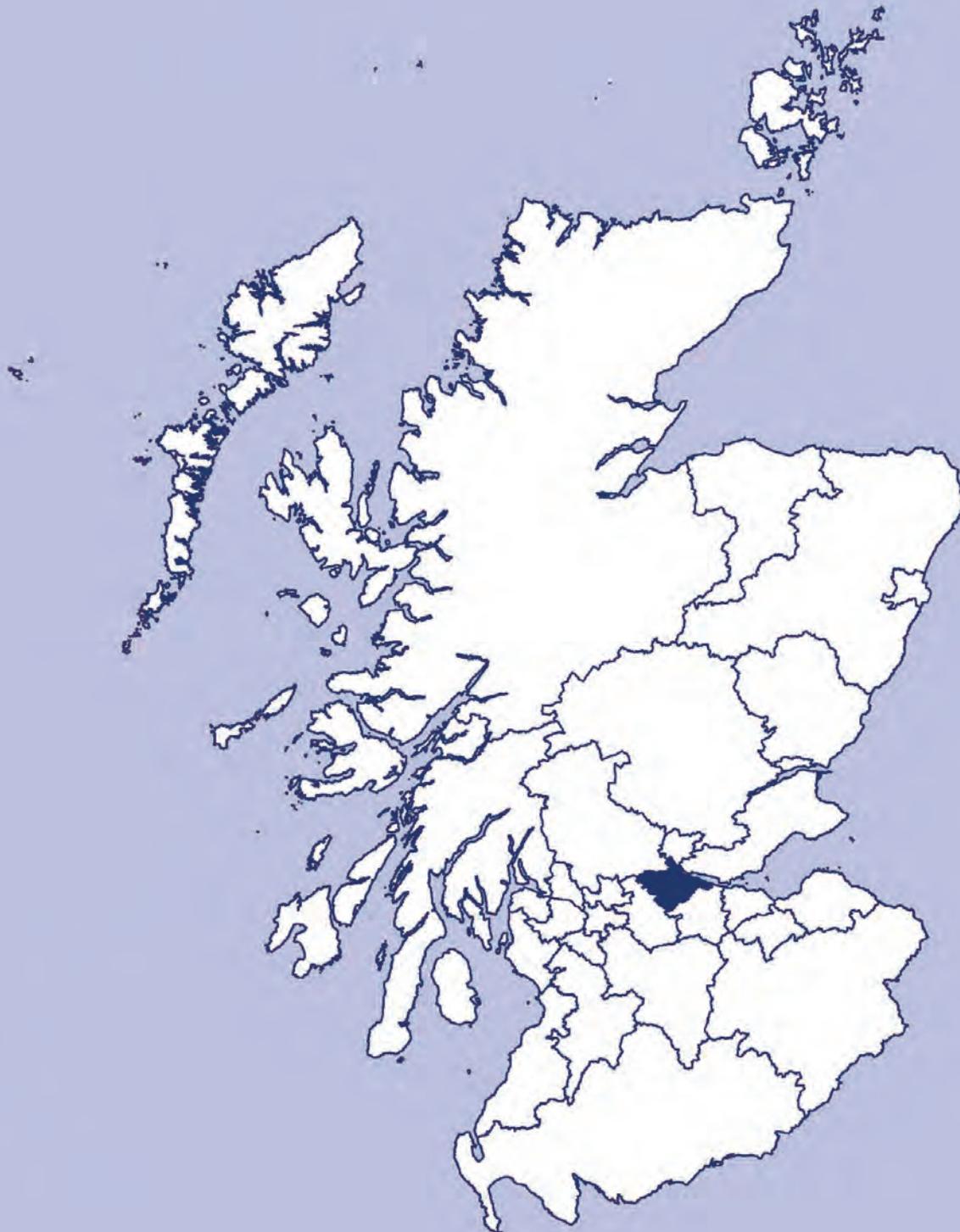
Date: 6 June 2016

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. File reference DP/GN/43: Local Government Boundary Commission Fifth Review of Electoral Arrangements.

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone 01324 506076 and ask for Rose Mary Glackin.

Fifth Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements Final Recommendations



Falkirk Council Area

Report to Scottish Ministers

Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland

Fifth Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements Final Recommendations Falkirk Council Area

Membership of the Commission

Chair:	Ronnie Hinds
Deputy Chair:	William Magee OBE
Commissioners:	Roland Bean
	Professor Ailsa Henderson
	Dr Susan Walker OBE

Report Number E16014

May 2016

Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland

Scottish Ministers

We, the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland, present our recommendations for Falkirk Council area resulting from our Fifth Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements.

In accordance with the provisions of section 18(3) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, copies of our report, together with illustrative maps, are being sent to Falkirk Council with a request that the report and maps should be made available for public inspection at its offices.

Notice is also being given in newspapers circulating in the council area of the fact that the report has been made so that interested persons may inspect the report and maps at the council's offices. The report is also available on our website and is being publicised on social media.



Ronnie Hinds
Chair



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Part 1 Background

Falkirk Council area

1. Falkirk Council area is in central Scotland and is bordered by West Lothian, Stirling, North Lanarkshire and Clackmannanshire council areas and by the River Forth. Falkirk Council area covers 315 square kilometres. The council's headquarters are based in Falkirk, which is the largest town in the area.
2. Under one in ten of the population (8.6%) of Falkirk Council area live outwith settlements of 3,000 or more people. It is therefore one of Scotland's more urban council areas.
3. Based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2012, the percentage of Falkirk Council area's population in Scotland's 15% most-deprived datazones is 8.2%. Falkirk Council area contains 18 datazones within the 15% most-deprived datazones in Scotland; these are located in Falkirk, Denny, Stenhousemuir, Polmont, Maddieston, Bo'ness, Slamannan and Grangemouth. This is a below-average level of deprivation compared to other council areas in Scotland.
4. The National Records of Scotland's (NRS) 2010 population projection (published in 2012) states that Falkirk Council area's population is projected to increase from 158,216 in 2014 to 162,047 by 2019.
5. At the beginning of the review Falkirk Council area's electorate was 114,031 (at September 2013). The number of dwellings in the area was 71,742 (based on NRS 2012 data).
6. The existing electoral arrangements consist of 32 councillors representing 5 4-member wards and 4 3-member wards (see Appendix A: Existing and Recommended Wards).

Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland

7. The Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland was established under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 as an independent body with responsibility for keeping under review local government arrangements in Scotland.
8. We are required to conduct electoral reviews of each council area at intervals of 8 to 12 years, as specified in Section 16 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. We last completed such reviews in 2006. Those reviews introduced multi-member wards but councillor numbers were not amended. Our Third Review, concluded in 1997, was the last time councillor numbers throughout Scotland were amended.

Legislative requirements

9. The legislation which sets out the rules for electoral reviews is Part II of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. When making our recommendations, we must consider the criteria set out in Section 13 and Schedule 6 of that Act.
10. Section 13 sets out that we should conduct our reviews with an overall aim of acting in the interests of effective and convenient local government. Schedule 6 sets out more specific requirements.
11. The full text of Schedule 6 is in Appendix B, and its requirements are:
 - the number of electors per councillor in each ward shall be, as nearly as may be, the same;
 - subject to this, we shall have regard to:
 - local ties that would be broken by fixing a particular boundary; and
 - the desirability of fixing boundaries that are easily identifiable with the first of these taking precedence over the second;
 - we may depart from the strict application of electoral parity to reflect special geographical considerations.
12. Each ward must elect 3 or 4 councillors.
13. When recommending ward boundaries, we take into account the likely change in the number of electors in a council area within the 5 years immediately following our consideration.
14. There were no Ministerial directions in place when we conducted our reviews, but Scottish Ministers informed us at the start of the reviews that they would find it difficult to justify an increase in councillor numbers at that time. Our recommendations maintain overall councillor numbers in Scotland at a similar level as at present.

Fifth Reviews of Electoral Arrangements

15. This review is one of 32 being conducted across Scotland to make recommendations for the number of councillors on each council, the number of councillors in each ward, the boundaries of each ward and the recommended ward name.
16. Overall the recommendations provide for 1,219 councillors in 351 wards: a decrease of 4 councillors and 2 wards relative to existing arrangements.
17. Across Scotland as a whole, 94% of electors will be in wards where variation from parity is within 10% of the average for their council area, compared to less than 84% of electors under existing arrangements.
18. Across Scotland, the variation from parity between councillors will reduce from 6% currently to 5%. This means that representation of the electorate within council areas will be more evenly shared between councillors.

Issues considered

Effective and convenient local government

19. There is no statutory definition of effective and convenient local government. It is, however, the fundamental consideration for recommendations arising from any of our reviews.

20. Our approach recognised that effective and convenient local government has to balance effectiveness and convenience for a council, councillors and residents.

For example:

- councils need to manage and deliver diverse services across their council areas;
- councillors need to be able to carry out their functions including representing the residents in their areas; and
- residents seek effectiveness and convenience when they use local services and participate in local democracy.

Determining councillor numbers in council areas

21. Our previous methodology for determining councillor numbers was based on population. Given the diversity found across the council areas in Scotland we categorised each council into one of 7 categories, and applied the same ratio of electors per councillor to all councils in a single category. This means we had different ratios of electors to councillors in, for example, Glasgow City and Na h-Eileanan an Iar.

22. Prior to the formal commencement of the Fifth Reviews of electoral arrangements, we conducted a public consultation in 2011 on how to determine councillor numbers for the Fifth Reviews. We consulted with the public, councils, MSPs, COSLA, political parties and other interested stakeholders. The responses to that consultation suggested that we should continue to take a consistent, objective and transparent approach to setting councillor numbers.

23. The responses generally indicated:

- no widespread support for a significant increase or decrease in councillor numbers;
- support for the continued categorisation of councils so that a common ratio of electors to councillors applies to all councils with broadly similar characteristics;
- support for a reduction in the number of categories from the 7 used previously;
- suggestions of various factors, including deprivation and rurality, to be used in a transparent methodology for categorising councils which share common characteristics; and
- support for minimum and maximum councillor numbers in a council area.

24. The methodology we adopted for the Fifth Reviews:

- used measures of population size as the key determinant of councillor numbers;

- used a categorisation which relied on population distribution and a composite measure capturing the socio-economic conditions in the council area;
- employed measures aligned with common indicators used by the Scottish Government;
- led to the creation of 5 categories of council area;
- introduced a more equal range of elector to councillor ratios from 800 to 3,800. Most councils range between 2,800 to 3,800 electors per councillor;
- maintained the minimum number of 18 councillors per council area and raised the maximum to 85; and
- set a cap on change of councillor numbers in any council area of 10%. This was designed to minimise disruption for a council's governance.

25. Overall, population size remained the key factor in determining councillor numbers. We considered that population dispersal is an important factor in determining councillor numbers but we also considered that socio-economic characteristics, and in particular the composite measure gathered by SIMD data, provide a reasonable indicator for a range of factors that impact on the work of councils and councillors.

26. We used settlements and population data from NRS and SIMD data for Falkirk Council area. SIMD is determined independently by government statisticians in conjunction with the ScotStat Measuring Deprivation Advisory Group. SIMD combines weighted scores based on seven different dimensions of deprivation: employment, income, geographic access, crime, housing, health and education. We have used the 2012 SIMD dataset, the most recent available at the time we commenced work on categorisation. These datasets are calculated and published every 3 years by the Scottish Government.

27. For these reviews we maintained the minimum number of councillors at 18, as we considered this to be the minimum number of councillors to allow a council to operate effectively. However, we have extended the upper limit of councillors from 80 to 85 to increase the flexibility available to us and enable the ratios of electors to councillors to be more equal across Scotland in respect of the Fifth Reviews.

28. We were aware that a large change in councillor numbers in a council area could be disruptive to a council's governance, so we incorporated a 10% limit on change. This means that, as a rule, we have not proposed, as a result of our methodology for determining councillor numbers, to increase or decrease the total number of councillors in a council area by more than 10%.

29. We used cluster analysis to support our development of categories and placed each council area into 1 of 5 categories. We agreed on 5 categories to reflect Scotland's diverse demography, including levels of population dispersal and deprivation within council areas. The ratio of electors to councillors for each category, and the council areas we have placed in each, is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Ratio of electors to councillors

Category	Criteria used to classify councils	Ratio	Council area
1	Less than 30% of the population living outwith settlements of 3,000 or more people AND 30% or more of the population living in the 15% most deprived datazones	2,800	Glasgow City Inverclyde
2	Less than 30% of the population living outwith settlements of 3,000 or more people AND 15% or more and less than 30% of the population living in the 15% most deprived datazones	3,000	Clackmannanshire Dundee City East Ayrshire North Ayrshire North Lanarkshire Renfrewshire West Dunbartonshire
3	Less than 30% of the population living outwith settlements of 3,000 or more people AND less than 15% of the population living in the 15% most deprived datazones	3,800	Aberdeen City Angus City of Edinburgh East Dunbartonshire East Lothian East Renfrewshire Falkirk Fife Midlothian South Ayrshire South Lanarkshire West Lothian
4	Between 30% and 59% of the population living outwith settlements of 3,000 or more people AND less than 15% of the population living in the 15% most deprived datazones	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 outwith settlements of 3,000 or more people AND less than 15% of the population living in the 15% most deprived datazones	800	Na h-Eileanan an Iar Orkney Islands Shetland Islands

30. The overall effect of our methodology is to retain core existing elements of the previous methodology but also introduce changes that would make the ratios of electors to councillors more equal across Scotland. The methodology also now draws on factors frequently used by the Scottish Government (such as the current measures for population distribution and the use of SIMD data that are used as policy tools) to categorise the council areas. This had the added benefit of not measuring the same factor twice, as was the case when using both population density and population distribution.

31. Our methodology placed Falkirk Council area within category 3 (see Appendix C: Categorising Councils Matrix), as one of the more urban council areas with below-average deprivation, with a ratio of electors per councillor of 3,800.

Electorate data

32. At the start of the review, we obtained the electoral register as at 1 September 2013 from the Electoral Registration Officer for Falkirk Council area. This dataset included postcodes, which allowed us to calculate the electorate for each postcode in the area under consideration, and hence for each proposed ward.
33. We used September 2013 electorate data because that was the most-recent dataset available when we began work on the review. We used the local government electorate, that is those on the electoral register who are aged 18 and over and registered to vote in local government elections. The local government electorate at September 2013 was 114,031 in Falkirk Council area.
34. In line with the rules governing reviews, when considering electoral parity we had regard to the likely change in the number and distribution of the local government electorate over a 5-year period immediately following our consideration of the electoral arrangements.
35. To assist us we asked Falkirk Council to provide us with forecasts of new house building, residential property demolitions and institutional development (such as students' halls of residence) that are likely to be occupied within the next 5 years. Falkirk Council provided us with data based on its 2013 Residential Land Audit, which documented expected new residential and institutional development, as well as demolition within its area over the 5-year period.
36. From these datasets, combined with data on the average number of electors per dwelling in the area, we calculated a forecast electorate. We also used population projections from NRS. Using these, we scaled the forecast electorate to reflect the projected population change 5 years hence.
37. Fluctuations in population not incorporated into our forecasts will be taken into consideration in subsequent electoral reviews. The next electoral reviews are our interim reviews scheduled for 2021.

Ward design

38. The Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 specifies that each ward will return either 3 or 4 councillors. The choice of the number of councillors for each ward has been determined by the overall pattern of wards we considered to be appropriate for the area to deliver effective and convenient local government and to achieve good electoral parity.

Electoral parity

39. One of the principal aims of a review is to make recommendations that provide for a good level of electoral parity. Electoral parity means having the same number of electors per councillor in all wards in a council area.

40. Subject to effective and convenient local government, the legislation gives priority to electoral parity over other factors in ward design, except where special geographical circumstances apply.
41. We worked out the theoretical number of electors each councillor should represent by dividing the total number of electors in the council area in September 2013 by the proposed number of councillors. This produced a ratio of electors per councillor for each council area. The ratio allowed us to apply the requirement in the legislation that the number of electors per councillor is 'as nearly as may be' the same. A 3-member ward and 4-member ward would have 3 and 4 times this number of electors respectively.
42. Once we had calculated the number of electors per councillor, we measured how far the electorate in each ward deviated from that number. When formulating our recommendations, we sought to achieve ratios that were acceptable in every ward. We aimed to recommend wards that had a forecast electorate within a maximum 10% variation from parity, as suggested by the Venice Commission's 'Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters'. We did not apply this measure as a strict numerical limit but instead this appeared to us to provide a reasonable degree of flexibility in most circumstances. In designing wards, we considered local circumstances as permitted by the legislation.

Local ties

43. When designing wards, we aimed to avoid breaking local ties, as far as permitted by the legislation.
44. Local ties can be defined by the location of public facilities such as doctors' surgeries, hospitals, libraries or schools. An area's history and tradition may be the basis of local ties. However, communities are constantly evolving and historical considerations may not have such importance in areas which have been subject to recent development or population dispersal. Major roads could be seen to be the focus of an area if they are the location of shops or community facilities which people visit regularly. Alternatively, major roads, rivers or railway lines could be seen as physical barriers between different communities.
45. In some areas, we have combined two or more distinct and separate communities within a single ward.
46. We also had regard to other recognised boundaries which may reflect local communities or local ties in designing ward boundaries. These boundaries could include those of community council areas, polling districts and primary school catchment areas.

Easily-identifiable boundaries

47. The legislation requires us to take into account the desirability of fixing boundaries that are and will remain easily-identifiable, but electoral parity and local ties take precedence.

48. In some areas, a case can be made to define ward boundaries along roads since they are likely to remain clearly identifiable, and are unlikely to be straddled by new dwellings. As an alternative, drawing a boundary along the rear fences between houses will result in neighbours across a street being in the same ward which may appropriately reflect local ties.

49. In some areas, natural features such as watercourses and edges of woodland may be appropriate. In upland areas, a watershed may be an appropriate ward boundary feature, particularly along narrow, well-defined ridges.

50. Ward boundaries have also been standardised where appropriate to follow road centrelines and river/waterway centrelines in order to create more easily-identifiable ward boundaries.

Special geographical considerations

51. We can depart from strict adherence to electoral parity for a ward where there are special geographical considerations that make it desirable to do so. These considerations can apply to socio-economic factors as well as to physical geography. Such considerations could include any areas where transport and communication links are slow, infrequent or subject to interference by the weather and seasons. Examples would be islands, sparsely populated areas and remote areas.

Other factors

52. It is important to note that our reviews are concerned only with electoral matters. Issues such as addresses, postcodes, community council boundaries and school catchment areas are all decided by other bodies and do not change as a direct consequence of ward boundary changes.

Consultation

53. Our approach to conducting the Fifth Reviews was one of engagement and openness. We publicised the review widely, and asked that councils do the same. Legislation governing the conduct of reviews is at Appendix D. At the start of the reviews we met all 32 councils individually to discuss our proposals for councillor numbers.

54. The legislation requires us to consult with councils for a 2-month period and to take into consideration their views prior to consulting publicly on proposals. We conducted a two-stage consultation, firstly for councillor numbers, and secondly for our ward proposals.

55. When publicising the consultations we issued a news release, placed public notices in the local press and supplied materials for councils to make available at council-nominated display points. We also used Facebook, Twitter and our website for publicity and asked councils to publicise the reviews on their websites. The local press used in Falkirk Council area were the 'Falkirk Herald' and the 'Bo'ness Journal'.

56. The display points agreed with Falkirk Council were located in: Falkirk Municipal Buildings, Falkirk; One Stop Shop, Camelon; Falkirk Library; Meadowbank Library, Polmont; One Stop Shop, Bainsford; Bonnybridge Library; Larbert Library; Denny Library; Bo'ness Library; Slamannan Library; Banknock Community Centre; and Grangemouth Library.
57. We also wrote to a wide range of interested parties including MSPs, MPs, political parties, community councils, COSLA and other representative bodies to inform them of the consultations.
58. Our public consultation portal allowed users to view maps and background information and to submit responses, including alternative suggestions during the public consultation phases of the reviews.
59. All responses to the consultations were fully considered by us and the papers and minutes recording our deliberations and decisions are published on our website: www.lgbc-scotland.gov.uk.

Part 2 Conducting the Review

Councillor numbers

60. Our methodology placed Falkirk Council area within category 3, as one of the more urban council areas with below-average deprivation, with a ratio of electors per councillor of 3,800. Using the ratio of 3,800 we initially proposed 30 councillors for Falkirk Council area, 2 fewer than at present.

Consultation with Falkirk Council

61. We wrote to Falkirk Council on 21 February 2014 announcing the start of the Fifth Reviews, providing background information and setting out our proposals for councillor numbers. The letter set out that we were consulting with the council on these proposals for a period of 2 months ending on 23 April 2014.

62. On 25 February 2014, we met the council to explain the review process, the methodology for the determination of councillor numbers and the proposed number of councillors for Falkirk Council area.

63. In its response to the consultation on councillor numbers, the council set out its opposition to the proposal to reduce councillor numbers in the area and pointed out the growth in the council area's electorate and population since 2007. It accepted that there was no reason to change councillor numbers in Scotland to any great extent and agreed that a nationally-applied methodology should be used to determine councillor numbers.

64. The council had no concerns about changing the population distribution metric to 3,000 from 10,000, and had no objection in principle to the inclusion of deprivation in the methodology and deprived areas having more councillors, but that it should not be at the expense of less-deprived areas. The council suggested making wards covering more deprived areas 3-member, rather than 4-member. It argued that as the 2 councils in category 1 are treated differently, Glasgow City is in effect a special case. The council considered that there was no good reason to increase the electoral ratio because the responsibilities and workload of councillors had not reduced. It highlighted the variation in levels of deprivation throughout the council area. The council suggested decreasing the proposed number of electors per councillor for category 3 councils to enable the council area to have 33 or 32 councillors.

65. We considered the council's response at our meeting of 1 May 2014 (see LGBCS Paper 2217/14 and minute of meeting M355). We decided to consult with the public on the same proposals for councillor numbers.

Consultation with the public

66. We consulted with the public on our proposals for councillor numbers between 29 May and 21 August 2014.

67. There were 4 responses to the public consultation for Falkirk Council area, none of which supported a reduction in councillor numbers, while 4 opposed a reduction in councillor numbers.

68. We received 2 responses for all council areas in Scotland and these are available on our website.

69. We considered the views expressed by respondents to the public consultation in Falkirk Council area. We also considered the views expressed by other councils, COSLA and other interested parties across Scotland concerning our proposed methodology. Falkirk Council did not give us a further response.

70. Our response to the consultation on councillor numbers is summarised in our statement on councillor numbers published in October 2014 (available on our website), which:

- explained our methodology;
- set out our view that the previously-used categorisation based on population distribution and population density was an incomplete model of the demands on councillors;
- noted a lack of evidence supporting the sole use of population distribution and population density to determine the ratio of councillors to electors; and
- stated our case that using deprivation and population distribution appears to remain a reasonable model for us to adopt in discharging our statutory responsibility to make recommendations in the interests of effective and convenient local government.

71. For these reasons we were content to confirm our use of the methodology at our meeting of 10 September 2014 (see LGBCS Paper 2228/14 and minute of meeting M358).

Ward design

72. We discussed our ward proposals for Falkirk Council area at our meeting of 7 October 2014 (see LGBCS Paper 2241/14 and minute of meeting M359) and decided on our proposals at our meetings of 3 February 2015 and 3 March 2015 (see LGBCS Paper 2276/15 and minutes of meetings M364 and M365).

73. Our proposals for Falkirk Council area presented an electoral arrangement for 30 councillors representing 6 3-member wards and 3 4-member wards, making no changes to the number of wards in the area and decreasing councillor numbers by 2. Our proposals:

- improved overall forecast parity;
- addressed forecast disparities in ward 2 (Grangemouth);
- reduced the number of councillors by 1 in each of wards 2 (Grangemouth) and 7 (Falkirk South);
- made changes to ward boundaries in Falkirk town and Skinflats;
- made no changes to wards 1 (Bo'ness and Blackness), 3 (Denny and Banknock), 5 (Bonnybridge and Larbert), 8 (Lower Braes) and 9 (Upper Braes);