

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

28 October 2015

Report by Chief Executive

FIFTH REVIEW OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS
LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of the report is to seek Council's homologation of a decision taken by the Chief Executive to respond to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's (Commission) in the terms outlined in this report. This decision was taken after consultation with a Cross-Party Working Group and was taken to ensure that the Council responded by the consultation deadline of the 22 October 2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. To seek Council's homologation of the decision taken by the Chief Executive to:-
- reiterate to the Local Government Boundary Commission the Council's fundamental opposition to the ward redesign proposals which are the result of the application of a flawed methodology and
 - under the terms of Section 19 (1) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1976, to call on the Commission to hold a local inquiry into the impact on East Renfrewshire of the Review of Electoral Arrangements.
 - Communicate with Scottish Ministers over the Council's concerns with the proposed methodology for the Fifth Review of Electoral Arrangements.

BACKGROUND

3. At a special Council meeting on 27 May 2015, it was agreed to reject the Commission's proposal for the redesign of wards based on 18 Councillors and that the Council should seek to maintain the status quo and reiterate to the Commission the Council's fundamental opposition to a reduction in the number of Elected Members as per the response to the first phase of the consultation in 2014.

4. If the methodology for determining councillor numbers had remained the same as previous reviews, the Council would have retained 20 councillors and status quo could have been maintained. These proposals, if accepted, will lead to significant changes to ward design and upheaval to local communities on a scale which is disproportionate and unnecessary. There would also be unnecessary administrative costs associated with changes to ward design. Therefore, it would be prudent to maintain the status quo.

5. Council officers have now analysed the responses of all councils in Scotland to the initial consultation on ward boundaries. The application of this new methodology, which was not consulted on and which has never been used elsewhere, has resulted in significant discontent amongst Councils. Seventeen Councils objected to the use of the methodology in relation to either the inclusion or subsequent application of deprivation as a key factor. A further 3 Councils objected to the methodology on the basis of the 10% cap on future electorate data calculations.

6. Councils commented that even if the principle of enhanced representation for deprived areas was accepted, the Commission has been unable to achieve this, at ward design stage, due to the need to ensure electoral parity. Therefore, in the views of many councils, the Commission has taken a flawed, inconsistent approach resulting in less electoral representation in many deprived areas.

REPORT

7. On 30 July 2015, the Commission began the 12 week public phase of consultation on proposed electoral wards for each council area. The Commission consulted with the public using the ward boundaries unaltered from the Council Consultation with the exception of the change to the proposed ward boundary between wards 2 and 3 at the Hillfield development near Patterton Station. This change was accepted by the Commission.

8. Following on from the previous Council report, Council Officers wrote to the Commission in July 2015 to seek further evidence for using deprivation as a factor. However, there was little new evidence provided by the Commission to justify this new methodology and concerns therefore remain valid. The Edinburgh and North Ayrshire material, properly understood, does not come anywhere near to providing support for the view that there is a sufficiently evidenced link between deprivation and increased councillor workload. The Commission announced in October 2014 that it was commissioning research into the role and workload of councillors to provide further evidence on the inclusion of deprivation and other factors but that this research would not be available in time for the Fifth Review.

9. Due to the public consultation deadline of 22 October 2015, a Cross-Party Working Group met on 2 October 2015 and expressed their support for the Chief Executive to respond to the public consultation by reiterating the Council's original response to the consultation on ward boundaries with a report submitted to the Council thereafter for homologation.

10. The Cross-Party Working Group also suggested that under the terms of Section 19 (1) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1976, the council should call on the Commission to hold a local inquiry into the impact on East Renfrewshire of the Review of Electoral Arrangements.

11. This report provides Council with a copy of the response sent to the Commission (Appendix 1) for homologation.

CONCLUSION

12. The Council is concerned that the way in which ward boundaries have been redrawn and the changes in elector to councillor ratios will have an adverse impact on communities. The Council believes that the current methodology adopted by the Commission appears inconsistent with the use of deprivation to determine councillor numbers then reverting back to parity as the main consideration of ward design without any further consideration of the distribution of deprivation in individual wards. After discussion, the Cross-Party Working Group were supportive of reiterating the Council's fundamental opposition to the Local Government Boundary Commission's ward proposals as per the previous Council report on 27 May 2015. In addition, the Working Group recommended that the Council call on the Local Government Boundary Commission to hold a local inquiry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. To seek Council's homologation of the decision taken by the Cross-Party Working Group to:-

- reiterate to the Local Government Boundary Commission the Council's fundamental opposition to the ward redesign proposals which are the result of the application of a flawed methodology and
- under the terms of Section 19 (1) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1976, Council call on the Commission to hold a local inquiry into the impact on East Renfrewshire of the Review of Electoral Arrangements.
- Communicate with Scottish Ministers over the Council's concerns with the proposed methodology for the Fifth Review of Electoral Arrangements.

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive

Report Date – 20 October 2015

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Response to the Local Government Boundary Commission dated 20 October 2015

BACKGROUND PAPERS

27 May 2015 Council report- Phase 2 Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland- Fifth Review of Electoral Arrangements- ward design proposals.

14 May 2014 Council report Phase 1- Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland- Fifth Review of Electoral Arrangements- determination of councillor numbers.

KEY WORDS

This report provides the Council with an update on the current position in relation to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's (Commission) proposals for ward design in East Renfrewshire Council as part of the Fifth Review of Electoral Arrangements.

Our Ref: LM/AT
Your Ref:
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Date: 21 October 2015

Chief Executive's Office
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Ms Isabel Drummond-Murray
Local Government Boundary Commission
for Scotland
Thistle House
91 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5HD

Dear Ms Drummond-Murray

Fifth Review- Proposals for Wards- East Renfrewshire area

During the public consultation phase, the Council re-iterates its opposition to the ward proposals which are the result of the application of an untested and in our opinion, inconsistent methodology.

As provided in our previous response in May 2015, the main reasons for rejection include:-

The change in the methodology has not been sufficiently tested

The rationale behind the change in the methodology used to determine councillor numbers by including deprivation as a factor has not been sufficiently tested by the Commission. The use of deprivation as a factor without considering the broad range of factors that might have an impact and the fact that the link with deprivation was asserted but not proven causes concern to the Council. It would be prudent to postpone the inclusion of deprivation as a key factor until the findings of the research into the role and workload of councillors is available in time for the Sixth Review.

Inconsistent approach

The Council disagrees with the introduction of deprivation as a factor in determining councillor numbers but then reverting back to parity as the main consideration in the design of ward boundaries, without any further consideration of the distribution of deprivation. This has led in some council areas to less electoral representation in many deprived areas and higher representation in many affluent areas. Therefore, it is our opinion that the methodology is flawed.



Lorraine McMillan,
Chief Executive, East Renfrewshire HQ, Eastwood Park, Rouken Glen Road, Giffnock, G46 6UG

Community links

The Council is concerned that the way in which ward boundaries have been redrawn and that the changes in elector to councillor ratios will have an adverse impact on communities as a result.

The Council believes that the current methodology adopted by the Commission appears inconsistent with the use of deprivation to determine councillor numbers then reverting back to parity as the main consideration of ward design without any further consideration of the distribution of deprivation in individual wards. Under the terms of Section 19 (1) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1976, the Council call on the Commission to hold a local inquiry into the impact on East Renfrewshire of the Review of Electoral Arrangements.

The response being recommended to the Council by the Cross Party Working Group tasked with considering the Fifth Review proposals is included in the attached report. The recommendations will be homologated at the Council meeting on 28 October 2015. If there are any changes to this, we will let you know.

I would ask you to consider the above and let me have your response in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Lorraine McMillan
Chief Executive