New Municipalism

Appendix G: Highland Region
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G1. Highland Region Overview

**Region Description**

The proposed Highland Region covers the existing Highland Council, which is undisputably the least local council in Scotland, plus most of Argyll and Bute. It incorporates the entirety of the classical counties of Caithness, Sutherland and Argyll, alongside Inverness and Ross & Cromarty outside the Western Isles, plus the isle of Bute from Buteshire and the Cromdale district of historic Moray. Although it’s easy to see why Argyll was in the old Strathclyde, and as distant as Inverness (the inevitable seat of regional government) is, the overall character of Argyll seems best fit for Highland.

With approximately 296,000 residents, Highland would account for around 5.4% of Scotland’s population. The Regional Council would consist of 60 Commissioners, whilst the 14 Municipalities that make up the region would elect a collective 198 Councillors. Of the 14 Municipalities, 12 would be Districts, with the remaining two being an Island and a City council.

In 2017, the SNP would have been the leading party on the regional council and in 3 municipalities (in terms of votes.) The Conservatives would have been second in terms of both councillors and commissioners, but wouldn’t have been the largest party on any. Instead, Independents would have been the most voted for in the other 11 municipalities, including a majority in Skye. The SNP and Conservatives would have been represented in all municipalities, with only Bute and Cowal lacking an Independent.

The Liberal Democrats would have been third in the regional council but fourth in terms of councillors, though they’d have been well spread across 11 municipalities. Labour and the Greens would have been the two smallest parties, both with representation across 6 municipalities each.
Comparison with Historic Boundaries

The proposed Highland Region of 14 Municipalities consists of the following areas under previous local government schemes:

- **1947 Act – 68 areas**
  - **Argyll County**
    - 10 Districts in full – Ardnamurchan, Cowal, Islay, Jura & Colonsay, Kintyre, Mid Argyll, Mull, North Lorn, South Lorn, Tiree & Coll
    - 6 Small Burghs – Campbeltown, Dunoon, Inverary, Lochgilphead, Oban, Tobermory
  - **Part of Bute Bounty**
    - Bute District and Rothesay Small Burgh
  - **Caithness County**
    - 5 Districts in full – Central, Eastern, Northern, Southern, Western
    - 2 Small Burghs – Thurso, Wick
  - **Part of Inverness County**
    - 5 Districts in full – Aird, Badenoch, Inverness, Lochaber, Skye
    - 1 Large Burgh – Inverness
    - 2 Small Burghs – Fort William, Kingussie
  - **Part of Moray County**
    - Cromdale District and Grantown-on-Spey Small Burgh
  - **Nairn County**
    - Nairn District and Nairn Small Burgh
  - **Part of Ross and Cromarty County**
    - 11 Districts in full – Avoch, Dingwall, Fearn, Fortrose, Gairloch, Invergordon, Loch Broom, Lochcarron, Muir of Ord, South West, Tain
    - 5 Small Burghs – Cromarty, Dingwall, Fortrose, Invergordon, Tain
  - **Sutherland County**
    - 6 Districts in full – Assynth, Dornoch & Creich, Eddrachillis & Durness, Golspie Rogart & Lairg, Kildonan Loth & Clyne, Tongue & Farr
    - 1 Small Burgh - Dornoch

- **1973 Act – 11 Areas**
  - **Highland Region**
    - 8 Districts in full – Caithness, Sutherland, Ross & Cromarty, Skye & Lochalsh, Lochaber, Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey, Nairn
  - **Strathclyde Region**
    - 1 District in full - Argyll

- **1994 Act – 2 Areas**
  - 1 Council in Full – Highland
  - 1 Council in Part – Argyll & Bute (excluding Helensburgh and Lomond area)
G2. Aird and Loch Ness District

Municipality Description

Aird and Loch Ness is one of several proposed Highland districts falling below the usual 20,000 target – covering such a vast rural area either side of Loch Ness, it just doesn’t seem practical to force it in with anywhere else. Only a third of the population live in settlements of 500 or more residents, which are Beauly (1,470), Drumnadrochit (1,150), Kirkhill (730) and Fort Augustus (660).

The SNP and Conservatives would have been joint first on the council, with a pair each of Independent and Lib Dem councillors, and a single Green rounding everything out.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- **1947 Act – 5 Areas**
  - In Inverness County – Aird, Inverness (part) Districts
  - In Ross and Cromarty County – South West (part), Muir of Ord (part) Districts
- **1973 Act – 3 Areas**
  - In Highland Region – Inverness (part), Skye & Lochalsh (part) Districts
- **1994 Act – 1 Area**
  - Part of Highland
G3. Badenoch and Strathspey District

Municipality Description

Badnoch and Strathspey comes in substantially under the 20,000 target, but given it served as a district previously, it should be quite capable of doing so again. For a Highland district the population is reasonably concentrated, with two thirds in the towns of Aviemore (3,240), Grantown-on-Spey (2,470), Kingussie (1,480), Newtonmore (1,100) and Nethybridge (660), plus plenty of smaller villages along the Spey.

The Conservatives would have taken first place on the council, with the SNP in second, and the remaining seats going two apiece to Independents, Greens and the Lib Dems. Notably, this is the only municipality outside of a large city where the Greens would notionally have won more than a single councillor.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- 1947 Act – 6 Areas
  - In Inverness County – Kingussie Small Burgh, Badenoch District
  - In Moray County – Grantown-on-Spey Small Burgh, Cromdale District
- 1973 Act – 2 Areas
  - In Highland Region – Badenoch and Strathspey District
- 1994 Act – 1 Area
  - Part of Highland
Municipality Description

By Highland standards, the Black Isle comes quite close to the usual population target. As a peninsula rather than an actual island, the exact boundary of the traditional area is slightly fuzzy, so the approximation here is hopefully good enough. It’s also relatively urbanised, with almost two thirds of residents living in Muir of Ord (2,690), Conon Bridge (1,990), Fortrose (1,590), Maryburgh (1,150), North Kessock (1,120), Avoch (1,020), the old county town of Cromarty (700) and Rosemarkie (650).

The council would have been one of a handful in the region where the SNP came first in 2017, with a Lib Dem and Conservative tie for second. A couple of Independents and a Green would round things out.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- **1947 Act – 5 Areas**
  - In Ross and Cromarty County – Cromarty, Fortrose Small Burghs, Avoch, Muir of Ord (part) Districts.
- **1973 Act – 2 Areas**
  - In Highland Region – Ross and Cromarty (part) District
- **1994 Act – 1 Area**
  - Part of Highland
G5. Caithness District

Not only does Caithness handily cross the standard population threshold, it does so substantially enough to be the only Highland region municipality outside Inverness to have more than the baseline number of councillors. In spite (or perhaps because) of its status as the northernmost part of mainland Scotland, it’s home to the third and fourth largest towns in the Highlands – Thurso (7,610) and Wick (7,040). The only other large settlement in the district however is Castletown (860).

Independents would have formed the largest group on the council, whilst the Conservatives and SNP would have been evenly matched in second. Labour would have held the remaining two seats, making this one of the handful of municipalities in the region with no Lib Dem representation.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- 1947 Act – 8 Areas
  - Caithness County – Thurso, Wick Small Burghs, Central, Eastern, Northern, Southern, Western Districts
- 1973 Act – 2 Areas
  - In Highland Region – Caithness District (historic Caithness only)
- 1994 Act – 1 Area
  - Part of Highland
G6. Cowal and Bute District

Municipality Description

The Argyll and Bute derived districts tend to more neatly make the threshold, with this one covering the Cowal peninsula and the Isle of Bute. Although both lie on the Clyde, making it clear why Argyll ended up in the old Strathclyde region, Argyll as a whole was simply too different from the Central Belt to be tied to any part of it. About three-quarters of the population can be found across Dunoon (7,830), Sandbank (1,310), Inellan (1,210) and Tighnabruaich (520) in Cowal plus Rothesay (4,390) and Port Bannatyne (1,140) on Bute.

The SNP would have come up one seat short of a majority on the council, with a tie between the Conservatives and Lib Dems in second, and a solitary Labour councillor.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- 1947 Act – 6 Areas
  - In Argyll County – Dunoon Small Burgh, Cowal District
  - In Bute County – Rothesay Small Burgh, Bute District
- 1973 Act – 2 Areas
  - In Strathclyde Region – Part of Argyll District
- 1994 Act – 1 Area
  - Part of Argyll and Bute
G7. Easter Ross District

Municipality Description

A rare case of a Highland municipality that’s about the right size, there may be a bit of dispute about the boundaries of Easter Ross. The division of Ross into Easter and Western is commonly stated but there isn’t a neat line drawn on any maps anywhere. This version of the district includes the settlements of Alness (5,800), Invergordon (3,980), Tain (3,590), Evanton (1,360), Balintore (1,010) and Milton & Kildary (650), all located along the Cromarty and Dornoch Firths.

This would be one of the handful of Highland municipalities with the SNP in the lead, followed closely by a group of Independents, and equally weighted pairs of Lib Dems and Conservatives.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- 1947 Act – 6 Areas
  - In Ross and Cromarty County – Invergordon and Tain Small Burghs, Fearn, Invergordon (part), Tain (part) Districts
- 1973 Act – 2 Areas
  - In Highland Region – Ross and Cromarty (part) District
- 1994 Act – 1 Area
  - Part of Highland
G8. Inverness City

Municipality Description

The Capital and only City of the Highlands, Inverness (47,290) has never yet had its own full City Council, though it was a Large Burgh back in the day. One of the UK’s most rapidly growing cities, it has become part of a single urban area with Westhill (5,410), Culloden (4,000), Milton of Leys (2,860), Smithton (2,270), Balloch (1,390), which would also be integrated into the City Council.

As the largest urban area in the region, it’s not too surprising to see that the SNP would have been by some distance the largest party on the council, but still far short of a majority. The Lib Dems would have been in second with the Conservatives nipping at their heels, and Labour doing their own nipping just behind. A single Green and an Independent would hold the last couple of seats.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- 1947 Act – 3 Areas
  - In Inverness County – Inverness Large Burgh, Inverness (part) District
- 1973 Act – 2 Areas
  - In Highland Region –Inverness (part) District
- 1994 Act – 1 Area
  - Part of Highland
G9. Kintyre and the Southern Hebrides District

Municipality Description

Coming up a modest four people short of the 20,000 mark, Kintyre and the Southern Hebrides covers some of the most remote stretches of mainland Scotland, the Whisky Isles of Islay and Jura, and the much smaller islands of Colonsay and Gigha. Despite that spread, about 60% of residents live in major settlements including Campbeltown (4,670), Lochgilphead (2,300), Ardrishaig (1,290), Tarbert (1,130), Port Ellen (810), Bowmore (720) and Inverary (560). Almost 20% of the population live on the islands, though overwhelmingly on Islay, showing the additional heft islanders can be given in their local councils.

The SNP would have been the largest group on the council, but though there’s a three-way tie between Independents, Lib Dems and Conservatives for second, the Independent group would actually have won the most votes between them.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- 1947 Act – 7 Areas
  - In Argyll County – Campbeltown, Lochgilphead Small Burghs, Kintyre, Mid Argyll, Islay, Jura & Colonsay Districts
- 1973 Act – 2 Areas
  - In Strathclyde Region – Part of Argyll District
- 1994 Act – 1 Area
  - Part of Argyll and Bute
Municipality Description

The Small Isles are really small, at less than 1% of the population of the district, but they’re just too cute not to name in the title of this district. In addition to traditional Lochaber itself, this district retains the Morvern and Ardnamurchan areas of Argyll which were transferred to Highland under the 1973 Act. Centred on Fort William (5,760) plus neighbouring Caol (3,220) and Banavie & Corpach (1,360), the other notable settlements in the district are the much smaller Kinlochleven (810), Mallaig (730), Ballchulish (640) and Spean Bridge (570), with the remaining 30% of the population spread over the vast rural area.

Notably this district has one of the largest disparities between seats and votes, with the SNP coming up just one short of a majority, but still winning fewer votes than a handful of very popular local independents. The Conservatives would have been third with a couple of seats, joined by a single councillor each for Labour and the Lib Dems.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- 1947 Act – 6 Areas
  - In Inverness County – Fort William Small Burgh, Lochaber (part) District
  - In Argyll County – Ardnamurchan, North Lorn (part) Districts
- 1973 Act – 2 Areas
  - In Highland Region – Most of Lochaber District
- 1994 Act – 1 Area
  - Part of Highland
G11. Lorn and the Central Hebrides District

Municipality Description

Centred on the largest town in Argyll, Oban (8,490), the population of this district is widely dispersed, with only Dunbeg (610) in mainland Lorn and Tobermory (1,010) on Mull as sizeable settlements. A quarter of residents live on the various islands, primarily the Mull group which also includes the second most populous island of Tiree. The Slate Isles are also notably quite well populated, with Seil the third most populous island in the district. The more solitary Kerrera and Lismore are correspondingly less populated.

As is not uncommon in the Highland municipalities, the SNP would have been the largest group on the council but come second in votes to popular Independents, who’d have an equal seat tally to the Conservatives. One councillor apiece from Labour and the Greens would round the council out.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- 1947 Act – 7 Areas
  - In Argyll County – Oban, Tobermory Small Burghs, North Lorn, South Lorn, Mull, Tiree & Coll Districts.
- 1973 Act – 2 Areas
  - In Strathclyde Region – Part of Argyll District
- 1994 Act – 1 Area
  - Part of Argyll and Bute
G12. Nairn District

Municipality Description

Nairn is one of Scotland’s smaller historic counties, but nonetheless makes for pretty easy district to re-form. Nairn (9,960) itself is the second largest town in the current Highland council, accounting for almost two-thirds of the population by itself, with only neighbouring Auldearn (640) also being large enough to be counted as a locality. Compared to the classical county this district also includes a small portion to the east of Inverness, centred on the village of Ardersier (1,190), which helps boost the population somewhat.

Independents would have been the largest group on the council, ahead of the SNP and Conservatives, with a Lib Dem holding the final seat.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- 1947 Act – 5 Areas
  - In Nairn County – Nairn Small Burgh, Nairn District
  - In Inverness County – Inverness (part) District
- 1973 Act – 3 Areas
  - In Highland Region – Nairn, Inverness (part) Districts
- 1994 Act – 1 Area
  - Part of Highland
G13. Skye Island

Municipality Description

Even by Highland standards, Skye’s population is low – only half of the usual minimum. However, it’s a large and distinct enough area that seems justified, making it the only Island council that isn’t a unitary authority. Most of the population is quite widely spread across the island, with only Portree (2,480) and Broadford (1,110) counted as large settlements. In addition to Skye itself, the municipality includes a number of neighbouring islands, but only Raasay has more than a handful of residents – even then, it numbers less than 200.

Skye clearly has a strong Independent streak, as all 7 who stood there in 2017 would have been notionally elected, giving them a majority of seats. The SNP would have made up the bulk of the remaining councillors, with only a single Conservative elected.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- 1947 Act – 2 Areas
  - In Inverness County – Skye District
- 1973 Act – 2 Areas
  - In Highland Region – Part of Skye and Lochalsh District
- 1994 Act – 1 Area
  - Part of Highland
G14. Sutherland District

Municipality Description

This district consists of the classical Sutherland county, with some small portions of Ross that are mostly down to using wards as building blocks. Sutherland contains some of the most remote portions of mainland Scotland dispersed over a vast area, with only Golspie (1,350), the county town of Dornoch (1,330) and Brora (1,240), all on the east coast, showing up as major settlements. The other 70% of the population in more rural villages, including a string along the north coasts.

The District council would have had a very rare three-way tie for first place, with the Lib Dems, SNP and Conservatives picking up 3 councillors apiece, with a pair each of Independents and Labour councillors making up the rest. As per the Highland norm, though they don’t have the most seats, Independents would have picked up the most votes.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- 1947 Act – 10 Areas
  - Sutherland County – Dornoch Small Burgh, Assynt, Dornoch & Creich, Eddrachillis & Durness, Golspie Rogart & Lairg, Kildonan Loth & Clyne and Tongue & Farr Districts
  - Ross and Cromarty County – Tain (part) District
- 1973 Act – 3 Areas
  - In Highland Region – Sutherland and Caithness (part) Districts
- 1994 Act – 1 Area
  - Part of Highland
Municipality Description

Wester Ross is the other hazily-defined section of the historic Ross-shire county, including the county town of Dingwall (5,470), confusingly located in the far east of the district. Apart from Strathpeffer (1,090), the other major settlements are along the west coast – Ullapool (1,520), Kyle of Lochalsh (650) and Gairloch (620). Compared to Easter Ross, this district is more rural, with half the population living outside these settlements. There’s also a very small north-western section of traditional Lochaber included simply by virtue of being included in the current Wester Ross ward.

The district council would have had the common SNP lead in seats, Independent lead in votes split, with the Conservatives equal with the latter in terms of seats. The rest of the seats would have gone to a pair of Lib Dems and a Green.

Comparison with Historic Boundaries

- **1947 Act – 10 Areas**
  - In Ross and Cromarty County – Dingwall Small Burgh, Lochbroom, Gairloch, Lochcarron, South West (part), Muir of Ord (part), Dingwall (part) Districts
  - In Inverness County – Lochaber part) District

- **1973 Act – 3 Areas**
  - In Highland Region – Parts of Ross & Cromarty, Skye & Lochalsh (part) Districts

- **1994 Act – 1 Area**
  - Part of Highland