

New Municipalism

Report: A Refreshed Map for Local Government in Scotland

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New Municipalism Project History

Version 1 – March 2019

Initial release

Version 1.1 – January 2020

Minor changes;

- Boundary changes between Glasgow City, Clyde and Lanarkshire Regions, resulting in a slightly expanded “Eastwood North and Eaglesham” District, replacing “Giffnock, Clarkston and Eaglesham” District with an additional 2 Councillors.
- West Lothian transferred into Lothian and Borders Region from Forth Region.
- Correction to notional 2017 results for Clydebank Burgh which had incorrectly missed an Independent.
- Electoral threshold reduced from 4% to 3%, in line with similar changes to other work at Ballot Box Scotland.
- New Website to accompany project launched at newmunicipalism.ballotbox.scot, replacing PDF appendices outlining regions.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Local Government in Scotland is having a bit of a moment in the spotlight. Since the financial crisis in 2009, a tightening of public spending has been felt strongly across Scotland's councils. In the 5 years from 2013 through 2018, the Scottish Parliament's budget fell by 1.6%, but Council budgets fell by 6.9%.ⁱ Council funding has therefore become a major battleground for Scottish Budgets each year.

As vitally important as the question of funding councils is, it's only one part of the puzzle when it comes to why Local Government in Scotland is often seen by the average voter as dysfunctional. As with the rest of the UK, the average size of a Scottish council is enormous when compared to our European neighbours. It shouldn't be a surprise that, lacking anything that could meaningfully be described as "local" government", people in most of Scotland don't rate it particularly highly.

Given the UK's long history of centralisation – as far as local government is concerned, Devolution just shifted that centre – arguments for radical shakeups in local government tend to be met with scepticism. For obvious reasons voters aren't familiar with the local government structures of other countries. It's more common to hear the question "Does a country Scotland's size really need 32 councils?" than calls for more and smaller councils.

However, that makes it if anything more necessary to keep making the case for reform. Until local government is geographically accessible to voters, it can't be politically accessible, nor truly representative. The norm should be to turn that question around and have people asking, "Why does Scotland only have 32 councils?"

Re-drawn council boundaries are simultaneously the most difficult reform to implement but the easiest to visualise and explain. New powers over taxation may make a world of difference to service delivery, but they often come with nebulous complexities. Meanwhile, the idea of your local council being based in your local town hall is extremely simple to grasp. For that reason, an attempt to outline an alternative map of Scottish Local Government seemed like a useful contribution to make to the debate.

1.2. The Wightman Connection

This work was inspired by Andy Wightman's 2014 report, "Renewing Local Government in Scotland"ⁱⁱ, for the Scottish Green Party. Now a Green MSP himself, Wightman has long argued that Scottish Local Government is disempowered and disconnected from the communities it is meant to serve. He continues to argue in Parliament what he did in 2014 – that almost all areas of Local Government need radical reform.

This report isn't intended to supplant that previous work. Instead, it seeks to expand on the structural side of it, by giving a rough idea of what the Local Government map of Scotland might look like were the principles Wightman outlined followed. This therefore isn't a complete blueprint for reformed Local Government as the issue of powers – particularly over revenue – that should go alongside new boundaries isn't covered in depth. Wightman's report addresses that in slightly more detail, as have further Green papers (though within context of empowering existing councils) including their "Fair Funding for Public Services"ⁱⁱⁱ report ahead of the 2016 Holyrood elections.

2. A Brief History of Local Government in Scotland

2.1. Ancient Shires and Burghs

To all intents and purposes, the bones of modern Scotland's local government date to the arrival of the Normans in England, and the (peaceful) extension of their influence northwards. Over the course of the Middle Ages the country was gradually divided into Shires. Although not formed for the explicit purposes of and long since superseded as units of local government, they've left a lasting impression. Particularly in the south, where areas (Dunbartonshire excepted) were historically less fragmented than in the North, you can still trace the rough boundaries of these ancient divisions.

At a more local level, a network of Burghs sprang up across the country at the same time. Most notable were the Royal Burghs, many of which would go on to develop as major trading towns, leveraging Scotland's ties to the continent. Other classes, such as Burghs of Barony, would be granted representation in Parliament but were less notable as trade hubs due to being granted fewer privileges.

Unsurprisingly, these traditional units often had more to do with the whims of the reigning monarch and the status of leading nobility than sensible governance. By the 19th century, as rapid social and economic changes swept the country, the need for stronger and more consistent governing structures became apparent.

2.2. Police Burghs and County Councils

What we'd recognise as Local Government today can be traced to the Burgh Police (Scotland) Act of 1833. Building on the already existing network of Burghs, the act conditionally empowered them to carry out many of the basic functions we expect of our councils today – roads, lighting, rubbish collection and so on. Initially quite stringent, the conditions to incorporate as the Police Burgh would be relaxed repeatedly over the subsequent decades, as well as allowing towns and villages that hadn't previously been granted burgh status to attain it.

What the 1833 act did for Burghs, the Local Government (Scotland) Act of 1889 would do for Shires. Except for that pesky Dunbartonshire, Shire boundaries were rationalised to remove awkward detached chunks, and governing functions consolidated into new County Councils. By this point, Local Government in Scotland had attained a suitably modernised form that it would retain for a century, albeit with repeated modification.

2.3. 1929 Act

A further Local Government (Scotland) Act in 1929 would begin a series of identically named acts that would regulate Local Government in a consistent manner, rather than considering Burghs and Counties entirely apart. The last vestiges of previous systems of administration, including parish councils, commissioners of supply, and education authorities were dismantled by this act and their duties passed to County Councils.

The wide range of Burghs were replaced with a simple division into Large and Small Burghs – though these wouldn't be explicitly enumerated until a 1947 Act (Figure 1). Counties were to be further subdivided into Districts. Small Burghs and District Councils were roughly equivalent in terms of powers, mostly concerning basic needs such as housing and sewerage. Large Burghs had substantially more independence from their County Councils, with the largest even responsible for their own Police forces.

2.4. 1973 Act

The biggest changes to Local Government since the Police Burghs would come about with yet another Local Government (Scotland) Act in 1973. With hundreds of Burghs and Districts below nearly three dozen counties, there was broad agreement that the system was no longer fit for purpose. Seeking something more fit for the era, all of those would be swept away. In their place would be 9 Regions, containing 54 Districts, alongside special unitary status for the 3 Island regions (Figure 2).

Dramatic as this was, the Wheatly Report it was based on had gone even further. Regions would have paid even less heed to historic boundaries, being identified in the report primarily by simple geographic descriptors. Most controversially, Fife was to be divided, much to the chagrin of the Kingdom's people who successfully lobbied for their own region.

It was a similar tale at District level, which would have seen Midlothian and East Lothian amalgamated, Dundee extended to absorb neighbouring towns across the Tay, whilst Glasgow would have further incorporated Clydebank, Bishopbriggs and – presumably to the delight of many modern annexationists – Bearsden. Two members of the Commission dissented, calling for more regions and substantially more numerous districts. What was eventually implemented leaned slightly in their direction but still left much to be desired in terms of locality.

Although it abolished the historic Burghs and Counties, this act nonetheless preserved the two-tier structure of local government. The boundaries and nomenclature around those two tiers may have been different, but the principle of dealing with different issues at different levels remained intact.

2.5. 1994 Act

If the 1973 Act seemed radical, it was nothing compared to what would come later in the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994, which laid out the current structures. The Regions and Districts set up only two short decades before were replaced with a uniform system of single-tier unitary authorities. Some areas such as the Borders effectively saw the Regional council continue with the Districts dissolved, whilst in others such as Central the Region dissolved with the Districts taking over.

With only one tier of Local Government, this act would also see the effective final unlinking of the Police and some other services from the purview of Local Government. Policing and Fire Brigades would continue to follow their existing boundaries until their mergers into single national bodies in 2013.

Seen alongside a long process of Central Government stripping Local Government of financial autonomy and the impending Devolution process, the 1994 Act effectively brought 160 years of genuine local governance to an end in favour of local-ish conveyors of national policy.

This isn't simply an issue of being unhappy that the HQ for a given council is located quite far from a given town. The huge areas and populations covered have serious impacts on the operation of local government. Councillors can find themselves taking planning decisions for areas they barely know - through no fault of their own, as who can familiarise themselves with every village in Aberdeenshire?

The demographic makeup of the council is impacted too. The prospect of serving as a councillor, already not exactly a dream career, is all the less appealing to young people and those with caring responsibilities (far more likely to be women) when you throw in the need to travel huge distances just to attend a committee meeting.

More local units of local governance can't help but improve matters on both of those fronts. If your council is responsible for a smaller area, it's a bit easier for councillors to develop at least a working knowledge of each part of it. And if you're able to swing by the Town Hall after dropping the kids at school, or hop on a short bus to the next town over rather than five along, then elected office is made at least a bit more accessible.

3.2. ... And What You Do with It

Paradoxically enough however, councils could also be criticised for being too small. There's a clear need for example to join up transport over wider areas than the current councils, or to better co-ordinate some aspects of education. Confusingly it isn't necessarily the case that bodies don't exist to carry out this co-ordination, it's just that they aren't always tied directly to local government.

The Strathclyde Partnership for Transport is one of the better examples, bringing together councillors from each of the councils covering the former Strathclyde area. On the other hand, a substantial part of NHS organisation is carried out via unelected regional boards (the SNP briefly toyed with the prospect of electing them), partly because managing purely at council level just wouldn't make sense. It isn't practical or necessary to fund cutting edge centres for cardiology or neurology in every corner of the country.

Former SNP MSP and Local Government Minister Marco Biagi perhaps captured the situation most succinctly when he tweeted to the effect that our councils are "too small to be strategic, and too big to be actually local."^{vii} Effectively, Scotland needs smaller yet broader local government. There's an obvious solution to this, which is to go back to the two-tier model that served us well for so long.

It is notable that within the UK only England has retained two-tier local government. Although the 1994 local government reorganisations in Scotland and Wales predate devolution, it is hard to avoid the sense that devolution has entrenched the current structure. Indeed, when Northern Ireland was reduced to a single tier in the 70's, it was assumed that there would be an Assembly in place to act as a regional body. The perception appears to be that regions would mean "too many" layers of government.

In the early days of devolution this argument may have had some merit. As Holyrood found its feet it may have pushed up less against the limits of devolution. Since then it has grown in confidence and competencies, with new powers increasing demands on the time and energy of an unchanged number of MSPs. That has left the Parliament with less ability to deal with local issues whilst Government micro-manages more aspects of local governance to ensure consistency and efficiency in delivery of national priorities.

Within that context, a re-introduction of a regional tier of local government looks even more appealing. It would allow other elected representatives to consider issues the Scottish Parliament may struggle to make time for which are beyond the scope of existing councils, such as regional transport and health. They would also allow the Scottish Government to loosen its grip somewhat on local government, being easier to co-ordinate regional delivery of national priorities with a smaller number of regional councils.

3.3. Continental Comparisons

It's easy keep saying that Scotland has the least local Local Government in Europe, but just how bad is it? Well outside of these islands, the only European country with fewer local government areas is Montenegro, which has 23 municipalities. The entire population of Montenegro is equal to Glasgow City Council alone, just over 600,000 people. The next fewest is Lithuania, which has 60. That's almost twice as many as Scotland for half the population. How about countries with a similar population? (Figure 4)

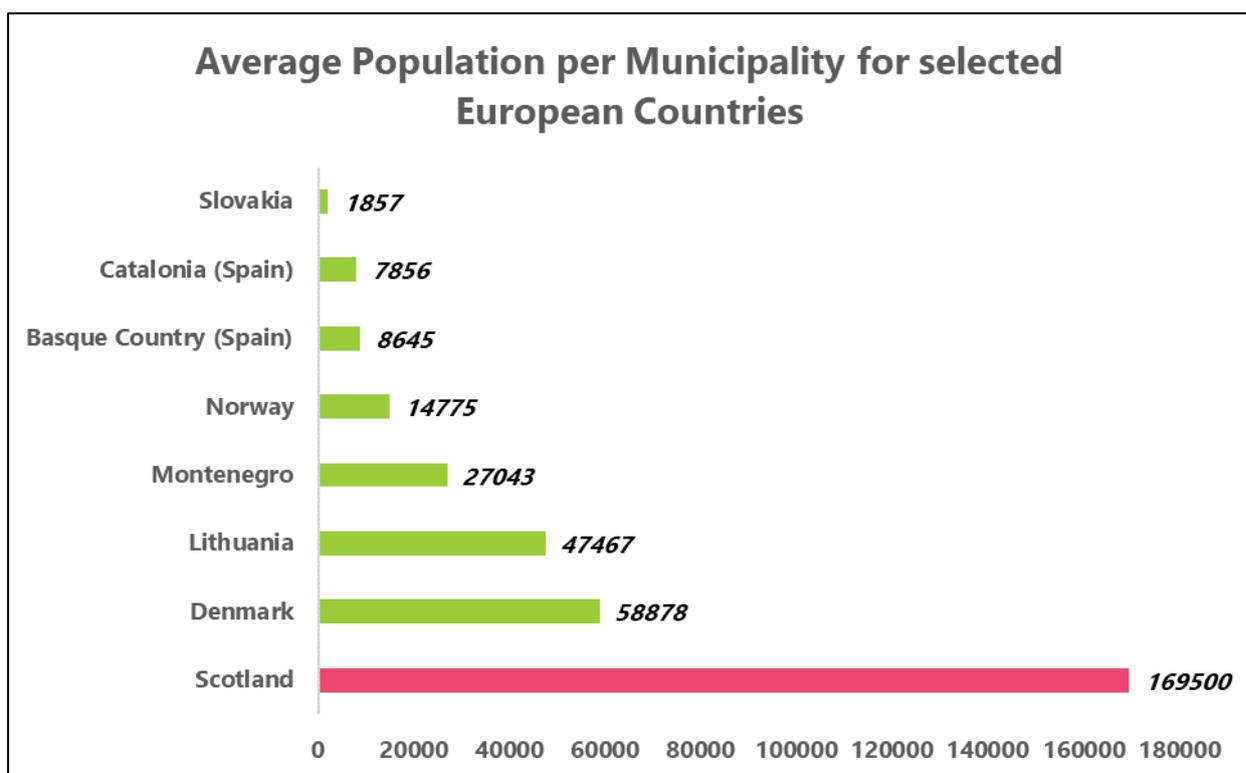


Figure 4 – Average Population per Municipality for Selected European Countries^{viii}

Norway, population 5.26 million, has been undergoing a process of local government reorganisation due for completion in 2020. Previously based on 19 Counties and 429 municipalities, they are condensing down to 11 Regions and 356 municipalities. That's an average population of 14,775 per municipality. Even in seeking to streamline local government, Norway recognises the importance of locality. That said, Norway covers a much bigger area than Scotland. What about smaller countries?

Well neighbouring Denmark, population 5.77 million, is divided into 5 regions and 98 municipalities, following a 2007 reorganisation. That's an average of 58,878 per municipality. But Denmark is half the extent of Scotland. (Only looking at continental Denmark, so excluding the self-governing Faroes and Greenland.)

Slovakia, population 5.44 million, and covering an area about sizes with Denmark, consists of 8 regions and a truly whopping 2,930 municipalities. That's a minuscule 1,857 people per municipality. That's perhaps a bit of an extreme example for Scotland to follow, but it's worth the comparison.

We can also look to Spain as the closest model to the devolved parts of the UK. Like the UK, Spain is officially a Unitary state, but it has granted substantial powers to its various nations and regions, known as Autonomous Communities. This highly decentralised nature carries down to the municipalities too, and some Autonomous Communities have implemented additional layers of local government. For example, Catalonia's 7.44 million people fit into 947 municipalities (average 7,856) with an additional 42 Comarques, basically counties, overlying them.

The Basque Country's 2.17 million are covered by 251 municipalities (8,645 average) plus each of the three Provinces that make up the community have their own "Foral Councils" with such strong powers, including tax raising powers (due to a unique historical status), that the Autonomous Community itself is almost a federation. Clearly, a decentralised system of national government in Spain hasn't necessitated the centralisation of local government Scotland has witnessed.

3.4. What about Community Councils?

Envisioned partly as replacements for much older Parish Councils, Community Councils were introduced with the 1973 Act. These are meant to act as a link between more natural local communities and the more distant local councils, being given certain rights to be consulted on issues such as planning. They are also the favoured Scottish Government avenue for delivering on somewhat nebulous commitments to "community empowerment".

Although the intentions behind Community Councils are positive, many consist of extremely hard working and effective councillors, and they are an already existing unit of "more local" government, they aren't a replacement for genuine local municipal governance. There are substantial issues in the way of tying governance and community empowerment to them.

For one thing, to be a community councillor is an entirely voluntary role. That subjects them to pressures on capacity and resources. The demographics of community councillors therefore lean heavily towards older, often retired people. Young people, parents with young children, or anyone with substantial caring responsibilities, who are all less likely to have time available to do unpaid work, end up substantially under-represented.

Even for those with time and skills to put into the role, the support and resources available from the local council aren't always enough to do it justice. Councils are strapped for cash, and community councils aren't a huge priority. All too often that means the communities they purport to represent are barely aware of their existence, limiting their ability to accurately gauge and represent views.

Another stumbling block is that community councils must be non-partisan. Enforced non-partisanship doesn't ensure non-partisan councillors. It instead seeks in vain to strip politics from decisions. Planning, licencing, budgetary input and community ownership are clearly political issues. It'd be better for partisan political affiliations to be obvious rather than pretend they don't exist.

That's not to suggest community councils should be stuffed with SNP, Conservative or Green councillors. But there should be nothing stopping "Thornwood Progressive Coalition" or "Pollokshields Ratepayers Alliance" groups from forming and being explicitly identified locally. Basically, without paying community councillors, stronger resourcing, and opening them up to partisan politics, community councils can never be a truly effective layer of local government.

4. A New Municipal and Regional Model

4.1. Two Tiers, Please

Two-tier approaches to local government are common across Europe. There are policy areas, for example transport and education, that would benefit from at least some decisions being taken democratically below the national level, but wider than just by individual towns, cities and districts. As noted earlier two-tier governance has historically been the form of local government in Scotland until the 1994 Act.

Municipalities would form the lower tier, generally covering much smaller areas than current councils. Sitting above them would be a regional layer. These two layers would complement rather than compete with one another. It becomes easier to justify dealing with some issues at a very local level if there is still co-ordination at the regional level, and vice versa. Burgh councils would simply be too small to operate as unitary authorities, but become ideal local units again in a two-tier system.

Looking at European norms, the issues most appropriate to deal with at the municipal level may include; urban planning, social care, leisure, housing, cleansing, environment, culture, local transport, nursery and primary education. The regional level may handle issues including; health, policing, fire services, regional transport, energy, secondary and college education.

4.2. Making a Municipality

Drawing up boundaries for new municipalities in Scotland won't necessarily be an easy task. Although the complete abolition of burgh councils by the 1973 Act was clearly a step too far, simply re-constituting them isn't the answer either. Whilst Paisley and Arbroath should have their own burgh councils, Dufftown and Whithorn were much more justifiably absorbed into wider districts. Nor can we simply focus on burghs, as smaller villages and rural areas need local government too.

Instead the basis for reform should be to achieve a minimum population, with a caveat. The 20,000 that Wightman suggests in his report sounds reasonable, but here is taken as residents rather than electors. It also happens to be the figure Denmark aimed for when it reorganised. The main caveat is that falling slightly short of 20,000 shouldn't block an otherwise sensible municipality, and much smaller populations may work in the case of very large areas such as the Highlands.

To implement new municipalities would require a public-led process to ensure that this re-organisation has more support, is better understood, and is longer lasting than previous structures. At the same time, given the complexity of issues around demography and service delivery, some expert and official involvement would be required. Local citizen assemblies augmented with a reasonable number of serving local councillors and relevant experts could be the way forward.

4.3. The Ghost of Regions Past

The consolidation of Scotland's counties into regions in the 1973 Act was a necessary modernisation, and some of those regions still look like a sensible basis for an upper tier today. Dumfries & Galloway, Fife, Tayside and Grampian would undoubtedly work perfectly well if re-created. Strathclyde meanwhile sticks out like a sore thumb as the prime example of how not to do regions.

That's not to say Strathclyde was a disaster. Its work on tackling deprivation, for example, was laudable. But a region containing more than 40% of Scotland's population in a triangle from Oban to Girvan to Lanark was just too big. Populous counties like Ayrshire and Lanarkshire didn't need to be consolidated into wider regions the way smaller counties like Banffshire and Selkirkshire did.

For a fresh implementation of a regional tier of local government fit for the 21st century, the 1973 regions serve as both a useful blueprint and as a cautionary tale. Regional government is always going to feel that bit more distant from the people it represents than municipal government, but that isn't an excuse to repeat the mistake that was Strathclyde.

4.4. Lego Bricking It

Especially for municipal government, it doesn't necessarily need to be the case that each individual unit solely delivers a given service. There's nothing wrong with taking advantage of economies of scale where appropriate by pooling certain services over a slightly wider area, if democratic oversight is maintained. This has been referred to in the past as a "Lego Brick" model, allowing municipalities (regions) to jointly deliver services where they think it best to do so.

SPT, mentioned in an earlier section, provides at least the basis of a model for such voluntary partnerships. The actual Partnership consists primarily of councillors drawn from all member councils, ensuring each has some say in the democratic oversight of the body. Replicating that for more localised municipal bus services, for example across Ayrshire, or for refuse and recycling services between Caithness and Sutherland, could allow that balance between efficient service delivery and local accountability.

4.5. City Status Shenanigans

City status in Scotland has always been murky, but before the 1973 Act it at least coincided with local government boundaries in the form of burghs. A side effect of that reorganisation was that Perth and Elgin ceased to be cities when they lost burgh status. Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee each continued as districts and thus cities, retaining that status to the present.

Since then Inverness, Stirling and Perth have been (re-)granted city status, but find themselves in the peculiar situation of having no local government body to hold that status. Whilst it's not uncommon for city status simply to be a matter of prestige, it is unusual for cities not to be self-governing.

The ideal outcome for the current, Big Four, city councils is less clear-cut. Historically, all four have been organised in the same manner. The 1947 Act designated them all "Counties of Cities", they were then all districts within regions under the 1973 Act, and of course are now unitary authorities following the 1994 Act. Given the variance in size and surrounds between each city, it's not necessarily the case that each should have the same status in the future.

Although most countries in Europe do take a two-tier approach to local government it isn't always uniform. Unitary authorities aren't unheard of in countries that organise on that basis, with some similarly sized countries choosing to separate their capital (and largest city) from its surrounds, for example Oslo (Norway) and Zagreb (Croatia).

In Glasgow's case, although it's the least separated from surrounding towns, it would be difficult to integrate with neighbouring regions without getting dangerously close to re-creating an unwieldy Strathclyde region. A "minimal" Strathclyde consisting of Glasgow with Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire and Lanarkshire would cover a third of the country's population.

Edinburgh would have more than half the population of a Lothian (and Borders) region, likely making it overly dominant, especially given its status as the capital. Both would perhaps work best as unitary authorities. Aberdeen and Dundee are comparatively smaller, at 39% and 35% of the population of prospective Grampian and Tayside regions, and would therefore be easier to integrate into a regional structure.

4.6. Integrating the Islands

Scotland's island communities are a rather unique feature in a UK context. Over 100,000 people live in Scotland's various island groups. Islands like Lewis and Harris or Skye are home to many thousands of people, whilst you can count those who live on Sanday or Gairsay on your hands. Whatever their population, islands face unique challenges compared to mainland communities.

Two-thirds of islanders live in the current Orkney, Shetland and Na h-Eilieanan Siar council areas, which although they still have their own imbalances between large and small islands are at least entirely islands based. The remaining third share their local government with mainland councils – Skye and the Small Isles are in Highland, the remaining Inner Hebrides in Argyll & Bute, whilst Arran and the Cumbraes are part of North Ayrshire.

Given the populations involved and the 20,000-minimum aim for municipality size, it's hard to envision either breaking up the current island councils or bringing many other islands into island-only councils. With a population just over 10,000, Skye is the only island that's probably large enough that it can have its own council despite the target. That doesn't mean the voice of other islanders can't be significantly strengthened.

The move to smaller municipalities will make islands a larger share of the population. To take Mull for example, its population of about 2800 people against Argyll & Bute's 86,800 is only a 3% share. In a possible restructure where the only mainland component is Lorn, giving a total population of about 20,200, Mull would then account for 14%, giving it much more weight. Islay (4% to 16%) Bute (7.4% to 32%), Arran (3% to 12%) and Cumbrae (1% to 7%) similarly show how island voices can be significantly strengthened in local government whilst still combined with mainland areas.

4.7. Bums on Council Seats

Of course, these new councils would need elected representatives to sit on them. Currently councillor numbers form part of the Boundary Commission's recommendations, with a formula that takes both population and deprivation into account. That's how Clackmannanshire has ended up with as many councillors, 18, as East Renfrewshire, which has almost twice as many voters. There's merit in that approach, but it's harder to replicate in an amateur project.

An easier solution is to tie it purely to population. The minimum number of councillors, regardless of population, could be set to 13. To put that in context, the Clackmannanshire town of Alloa has a population of around about 20,000 and effectively has 7 councillors at present, so it represents a doubling of representation for that area. Above the minimum, the following formula is used;

- +2 for every whole 5,000 population between 20,000 and 50,000
- +2 for every whole 10,000 population between 50,000 and 100,000
- +2 for every whole 20,000 population above 100,000

The purpose of being +2 councillors at each point rather than halving the width of the band and doing +1 is that when starting from an odd number, +2 ensures every municipality will have an odd number overall. That ensures there's always the possibility to form a majority for any vote the council takes. Tapering the number of councillors so that larger municipalities have proportionally fewer representatives than smaller ones also helps to prevent bloat.

For comparison, Spain also uses a population-based formula. A municipality there with more than 20,000-50,000 residents will have 21 seats. 5,000-10,000 municipalities have 13. So, whilst we'd have more representatives than now, it's comparatively fewer per head than some other countries.

Regional councils would need another formula, and for clarity another title for elected officials. “Commissioner” has a bit of a history in Scottish governance, so it seems an appropriate title to revive. Rather than basing the formula on the population of the whole region, commissioners are instead allocated on a municipality by municipality basis. The baseline for all municipalities is 4 commissioners, then +1 for every whole 10,000 population above 20,000.

This weights representation on the regional council slightly in the favour of smaller municipalities, to ensure their voices are heard. Depending on the electoral system used, this doesn’t necessarily mean increasing the individual voting power of voters in those smaller municipalities. Unlike with municipalities, it isn’t possible under this formula to ensure an odd number of seats overall. Adding +2 for every increment would inflate representation too much.

Finally, unitary authorities would have to be considered slightly differently, as they’d be doing the role of both municipal and regional councils, and need correspondingly more people on committees and heading up council departments. In those cases, whichever is the larger of their current number of councillors or their number of councillors under the normal municipality formula is taken as their baseline, with a further 15% rounded to the nearest odd number on top.

5. The One-Man Commission – a Blueprint for Reform

5.1. Basic Outline for a New Map

This kind of reform is reliant on public engagement and no-one can predict or prejudge the exact outcome of that, but it would be useful to have an example of what it might look like in reality.

Following the principles laid out in the previous section, a system of 123 Municipalities in 10 Regions plus 5 Unitary Authorities was developed (Figure 5). Although at 138 local government bodies in total that's 4.3 times as many as at present, with 2404 municipal councillors and 627 regional commissioners, it's only 2.5 times as many elected representatives.

Counting only the lowest level units, at 128 councils that would be exactly 4 times as many than at present. That means an average population of a quarter the current value, 42375 (Figure 6). That still puts Scotland on the upper end of the scale, but nestled neatly in between Serbia and the Netherlands.

- Regions (Municipalities)
 - Ayrshire (12)
 - Clyde (17)
 - Dumfries and Galloway (5)
 - Fife (10)
 - Forth (10)
 - Grampian (14)
 - Highland (14)
 - Lanarkshire (15)
 - Lothian and Borders (15)
 - Tayside (11)
- Unitary Authorities
 - Edinburgh
 - Na h-Eileanan an Iar
 - Glasgow
 - Orkney
 - Shetland

Some of the proposed regions should be relatively self-explanatory. Dumfries & Galloway, Fife, Grampian and Tayside effectively follow the same boundaries as their predecessor regions in the 1973 Act, though the municipalities below them obviously differ. Forth is a very marginally expanded version of the old Central. The three Island councils remain unchanged. Argyll and Bute, except for the historic Dunbartonshire portion of Helensburgh and Lomond, is added to the Highland region.

In avoiding the re-creation of Strathclyde, both Ayrshire and Lanarkshire were easy to spin off on their own. Clyde effectively combines historic Dunbartonshire and Renfrewshire – although separated by the river itself, the two areas have a pretty similar profile, and Dunbartonshire in particular is a bit too small to be a region alone. Glasgow then sits as a Unitary to avoid dominance.

Lothian and Borders effectively combines those two historic regions, except for Edinburgh which is the other major city Unitary as it'd have just over half the population of the whole area if included. This might be slightly controversial given the distinct identity of the Borders, but they are reasonably well connected to Lothian and would be the smallest region otherwise.

Proposed Local Government Map

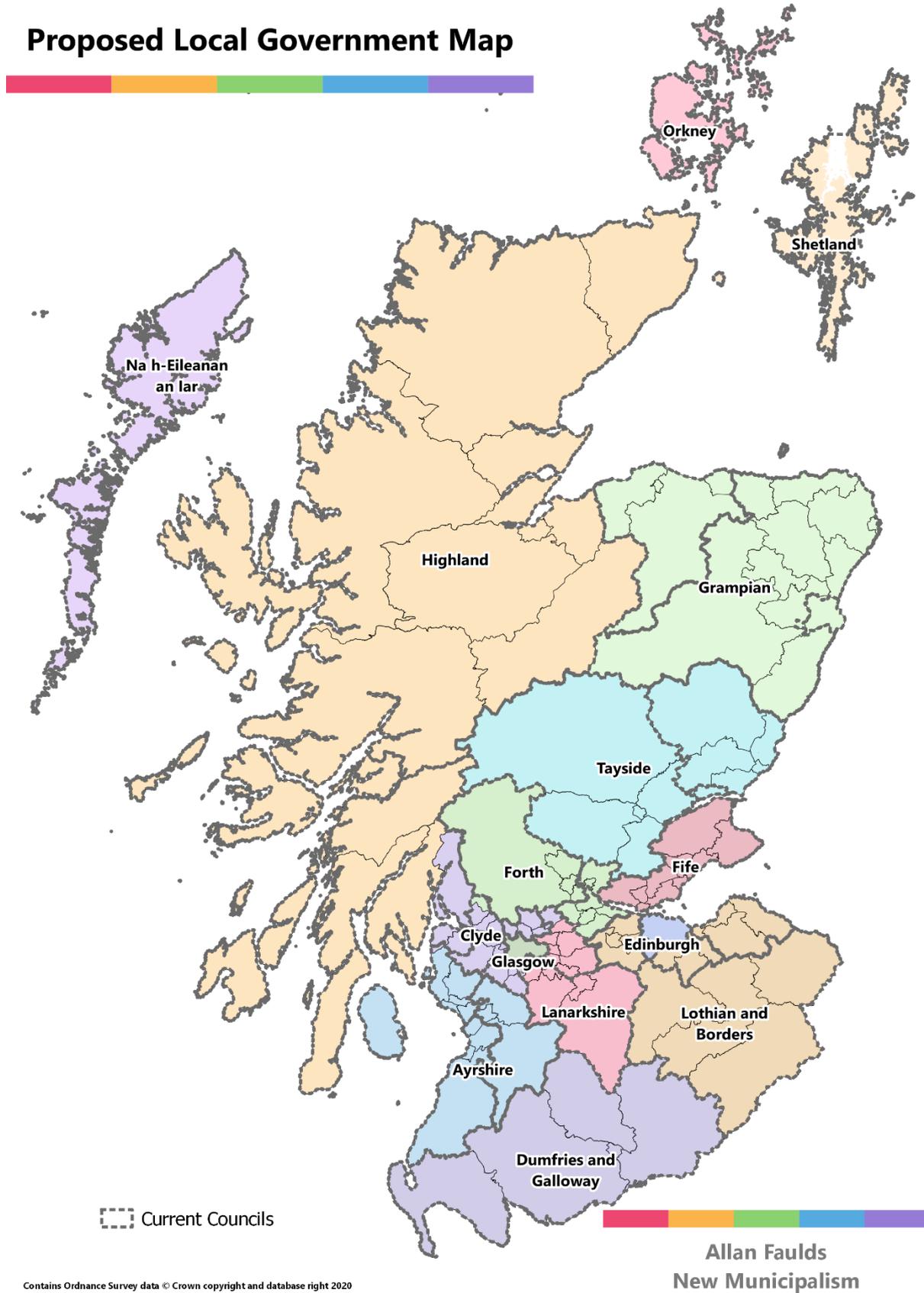


Figure 5 – Proposed New Boundaries
(Interactive Version: <http://newmunicipalism.ballotbox.scot/interactive-map>)

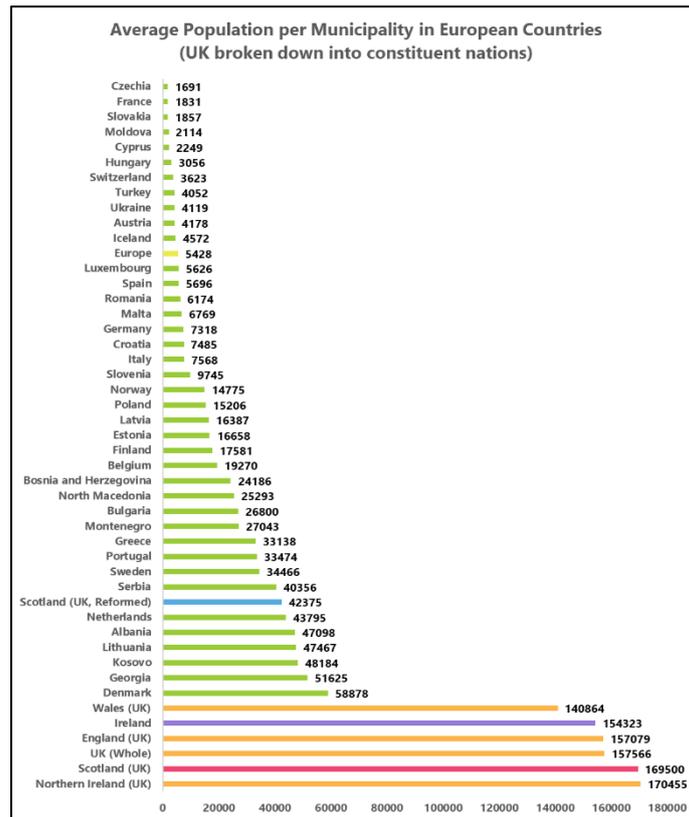


Figure 6 – Average Population per Municipality in European Countries

5.2. Notes on Methodology

The most basic building blocks for constructing these proposed new municipalities were the existing 354 council wards. Some municipalities, such as Perth City or Dalkeith District, are constructed purely from wards. However, in many parts of the country wards didn't align neatly with more natural boundaries, such as towns or historic shires.

For example, Wigtownshire's historic eastern boundary is the River Cree, but present council wards in the area span both banks. Similarly, the single ward of Renfrew South and Gallowhill covers parts of both Renfrew and Paisley. In these cases, wards were split as necessary to give more natural boundaries. Wherever possible these splits follow other boundaries such as rivers and roads. Whilst the resulting municipalities therefore follow more natural boundaries than the wards they were initially based on, that does impact on the ability to estimate population figures.

All population figures are drawn from the official Scottish Government statistics website^{ix}, and are for 2017. Where wards have been split as described above, the best possible fit "2011 Datazone(s)" for the split areas were allocated to the appropriate municipality. This inevitably leads to small differences in estimated populations compared to what is actually the case.

The overall effect of this was to end up creating an extra 19536 Scots out of thin air if you sum up all population totals. That's only 0.36% of Scotland's real population so is unlikely to have any more impact than the occasional extra 2 councillors for a municipality. Any genuine process of reform would have the full weight of accurate statistics to hand.

In terms of the physical mapping of boundaries, this project used Ordnance Survey's Boundary Lines package loaded into QGIS and overlain on OpenStreetMaps.

6. Imaginary Elections for Imaginary Councils

6.1. An Alternative Vote

For the purposes of minimising disruption, simply continuing to use STV for elections would be the easiest option. However, for an amateur project, it's very difficult to use even the vast wealth of data available from STV elections to estimate notional 2017 results for the proposed new boundaries. As a rough idea of political breakdown for the re-drawn councils is useful, notional results were calculated using a simple system of list proportional representation.

This system took each municipal council as a single electoral area. Using the D'Hondt formula, seats are allocated using the results for parties that win at least 3% of the vote (2017 first preferences), as well as Independents with any vote share.

At the regional level, the same basic system is used, but with each municipality acting as an individual ward. All but one of the seats are elected directly based on the votes in that municipality. The remaining pool of seats are allocated to parties proportionally based on their votes across the whole region, then back-allocated to fill the last seat in each municipality. Like Independents in municipalities, purely local parties would be allowed to bypass the % threshold at this level.

To translate 2017 STV votes into this system, first preferences were counted as simple votes, and independents were only counted at municipal level. Where a party had only stood in part of a municipality or region, the number of second preferences for that party from others in that part was used to estimate a result for them across the whole area, though at a reduced rate on the assumption that the party had chosen to stand in its best area(s).

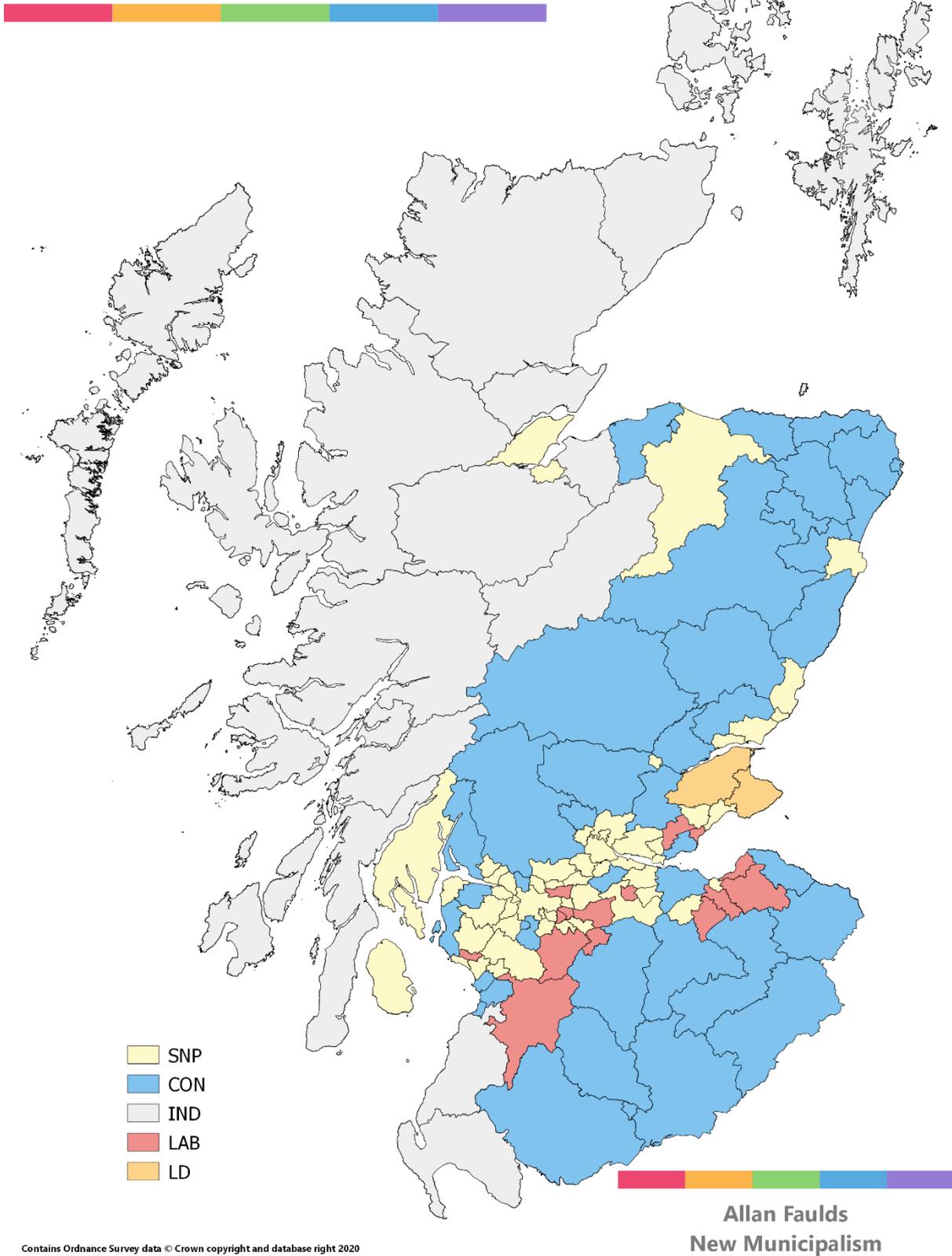
As one final caveat to emphasise the completely notional nature of the following figures, voter and party behaviour would obviously have been quite different were this system in place. With all that said, the estimated 2017 results on the proposed boundaries (Figure 7) using the above principles would have seen the SNP with 847 Councillors and 230 Commissioners; the Conservatives with 675 and 192; Labour with 493 and 134, the Liberal Democrats with 138 and 51; Greens with 45 and 18; Independents with 186 and 0; and various Other parties with 20 and 2.

Region	Population	Councillors	Commissioners	SNP	CON	LAB	LD	GRN	IND	OTH	SNP	CON	LAB	LD	GRN	OTH
Ayrshire	368235	200	57	74	64	50	0	0	11	1	23	20	14	0	0	0
Clyde	597682	301	87	109	81	76	16	2	14	3	32	24	22	6	2	1
Dumfries and Galloway	149200	83	23	20	37	17	2	0	7	0	6	11	5	1	0	0
Edinburgh	513210	85	0	23	24	16	12	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fife	371410	190	54	72	42	52	21	3	0	0	19	12	14	7	2	0
Forth	306783	164	47	70	47	38	1	3	5	0	19	15	10	1	2	0
Glasgow	619740	99	0	42	15	31	3	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grampian	587138	246	80	83	103	14	27	4	15	0	26	32	8	11	3	0
Highland	295826	198	60	66	43	11	29	7	42	0	24	15	6	11	4	0
Lanarkshire	657890	311	88	125	65	105	5	1	5	5	35	19	29	4	0	1
Lothian and Borders	491260	255	72	85	81	66	7	5	11	0	23	23	19	4	3	0
Na h-Eileanan Iar	26950	35	0	8	2	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Orkney	22000	25	0	0	0	0	0	1	20	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shetland	23080	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tayside	417608	187	59	70	71	17	15	1	13	0	23	21	7	6	2	0
Scotland Total	5448012	2404	627	847	675	493	138	45	186	20	230	192	134	51	18	2

Figure 7 – Overall Notional 2017 Breakdown for Proposed New Municipalities and Regions

Overall, these estimate the SNP would have won the most votes on 53 municipal councils, the Conservatives on 42, Independents on 16, Labour on 15, and the Liberal Democrats on 2 (Figure 8). At the Regional level only the SNP (with 8) and the Conservatives (with 2) would have been leading parties.

Notional Most Voted for Party 2017



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Figure 8 – Notional Most Voted for Party 2017, Proposed Municipalities

6.2. A Local Division for Local People

Although the municipal electoral system proposed in this paper looks like a relatively simple list system with no local sub-divisions comparable to current council wards, that doesn't mean they can't be implemented. For Denmark's Parliamentary Elections, the country is divided into 10 constituencies, but beneath those lie around 90 "nominating districts". Party lists can vary between districts in a constituency, allowing a sense that individual MPs represent specific districts.

The Danish example may be for national elections, but the principle is applicable to local elections too, and can even be strengthened. Municipalities could be divided into Electoral Divisions (or Wards – a different title is just to differentiate from current wards for clarity within this report) corresponding to natural community boundaries. Each division would be apportioned a share of the seats in the municipality based on population (Figure 9).

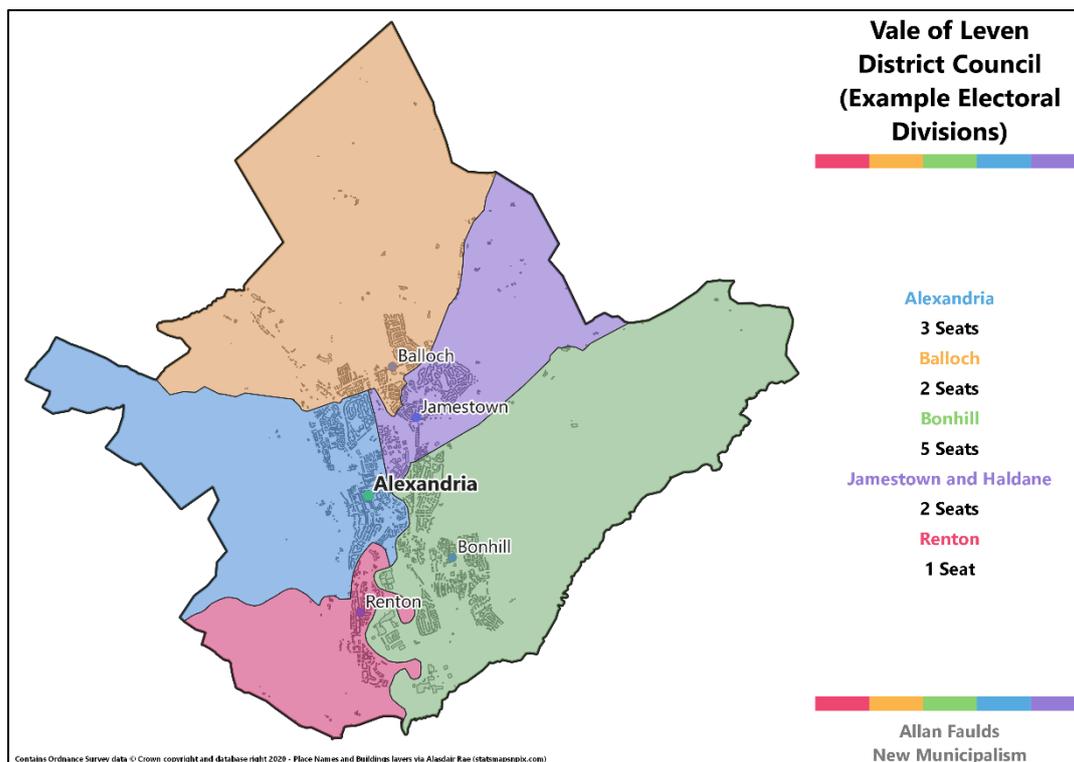


Figure 9 – Example Electoral Divisions for proposed Vale of Leven District Council

At elections, the first count of votes would work out how many seats each party wins across the whole municipality. A second count would work out how many votes each party won in each Electoral Division, and then distribute the seats worked out at the previous count accordingly. Parties (and/or independents) would ideally be allocated seats in the Divisions where they had most support. A third and final count would then allocate each party's seats in each Division to the candidate(s) winning the most votes in that Division.

A "strong" form of this system would have councillors explicitly only representing residents in their Division. A "weak" form would only name them as a specific point of contact for residents in their Division, but residents would be able to approach any other municipal councillor for assistance if they preferred. The former is most likely to ensure a balanced casework load between councillors, but the latter ensures that where there's only one representative for a given party (or it's an independent), they have the broadest possible contact with residents across the municipality.

6.3. Making a Major(ity) Comeback

One of the most notable aspects of the 2017 Council Elections was that, for the first time, no councils came under majority control of a single party. The introduction of STV for the 2007 elections had left only Glasgow and North Lanarkshire with single party majorities, but in 2012 a full half-dozen councils came under majority control. This isn't too surprising seeing as STV isn't perfectly proportional, for example allowing Labour to win a majority in Glasgow in 2007 with 43.3% of first preference votes.

Despite the electoral system proposed as part of these reforms being more proportional than STV overall, a dozen councils come out with notional majorities using the same votes. Effectively, the current councils cover such broad areas that even the strongest party's support is diluted enough to prevent them from claiming a majority. With much smaller municipalities, it's not surprising a few would cover places with highly concentrated party support.

For example, of Cumbernauld's 12 councillors on North Lanarkshire Council at present, 8 were elected from the SNP. It's quite natural that with its own burgh council that would translate to a majority under a list system too. Similarly, of Berwickshire's 6 councillors in the Scottish Borders, 4 came from the Conservatives. Translating those votes to a list likewise preserves a majority.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Final Thoughts

This report has offered a blueprint for how Scotland's Local Government map can be re-drawn to something more in line with the European norm, without repeating the mistakes of the 1973 Act, or returning to the complexities of the old system of burghs and counties. Convincing policymakers and the public that such a reform is necessary may not be easy, especially given the range of pressing issues facing government.

However, the current Local Government structures are unsustainable, and the longer they continue the more damage will be done to local democracy. Recent moves towards greater financial autonomy are welcome, but they'll need to be matched with boundary changes before too long. Crucially, ordinary people need to be put at the forefront when it comes to those changes, to ensure that any re-organisation most accurately reflects their needs and local identities. Done right, Scotland can have more effective and much longer lasting Local Government than has been delivered in successive reforms since the war.

7.2. Additional Detail

Alongside the [interactive map already mentioned](#), there is a full [New Municipalism website](#) with substantially more detail about each municipality and region, complete with pretty maps in image form.

ⁱ Local Government Finance: Draft Budget 2018-19 And Provisional Allocations To Local Authorities, Scottish Parliament Information Centre, 2018 -

<https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2017/12/18/Local-Government-Finance--Draft-Budget-2018-19-and-provisional-allocations-to-local-authorities#Historical-changes>

ⁱⁱ Renewing Local Democracy, Andy Wightman for the Scottish Green Party, 2014 -

http://www.andywightman.com/docs/RenewingLocalDemocracy_final_v2.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Fair Funding for Public Services, Scottish Green Party, 2016 -

https://greens.scot/sites/default/files/Policy/Fair_Funding_For_Public_Services_2016.pdf

^{iv} Scotland Administrative Map (1947), XrySD, Wikimedia -

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scotland_Administrative_Map_1947.png

^v Scotland Administrative Map (1975), XrySD, Wikimedia -

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scotland_1974_Administrative_Map.png

^{vi} Scotland Administrative Subdivisions, XrySD, Wikimedia -

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scotland_Administrative_Map_2009.png

^{vii} Marco Biagi, Twitter, 2018 - <https://twitter.com/MarcoGBiagi/status/1052561368174526465>

^{viii} Local and Regional Governments in Europe (Structure and Competences), Council of European

Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), 2016 (Partial figures; Good ol' Wikipedia for others)

http://www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_structures_and_competences_2016_EN.pdf

^{ix} Statistics.gov.scot Atlas tool, Scottish Government -

<https://statistics.gov.scot/atlas/resource?uri=http://statistics.gov.scot/id/statistical-geography/S92000003>