

Warding arrangements submission

The Council has been invited by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to submit a proposal for the warding arrangements for the Council of the Isles of Scilly. This should propose the number of wards, the boundaries for those wards and the number of councillors to be allocated to each ward.

In preparing this proposal, we have attempted to strike the best balance between the three statutory criteria:

- delivering electoral equality (i.e. ensuring as far as possible that each councillor represents a similar number of electors);
- reflecting community identity and interests; and
- delivering effective and convenient local government.

Off-island representation

The most fundamental question to consider is whether the off islands should continue to have their own individual representation. Maintaining individual off-island representation comes with a cost in terms of electoral equality. Electoral variances under the current arrangements for each of the five wards using the electorates in 2026, 2031 (forecast), 2025 and 2024 may be found in Appendix 1 – and in summary form in Appendix 2. The results are entirely consistent. For each of the four years in question:

- St Mary's and Tresco have good electoral equality (i.e. within plus or minus 10%)
- St Martin's has a variance between 11% and 20% above the average (with the St Martin's councillor representing more electors than average)
- Bryher has a variance between 21% and 30% below the average (with the Bryher councillor representing fewer electors than average)
- St Agnes has a variance of more than 30% below the average (with the St Agnes councillor representing fewer electors than average)

This electoral inequality could be dispensed with entirely by switching to:

- a 14-member council consisting of 11 members for St Mary's and 3 members for a combined off-island ward; or
- an 18-member council consisting of 14 members for St Mary's and 4 members for a combined off-island ward.
- an 18-member council consisting of 14 members for St Mary's, 2 members for a combined Tresco and Bryher ward, and 2 members for a combined St Martin's and St Agnes ward.

Electoral variances under these arrangements for the same four years may be found in Appendix 3 – and in summary form in Appendix 4. As can be seen, there is not a single case where good electoral equality would not be achieved.

Nevertheless it is our firm view that individual off-island representation should be maintained. The LGBCE final recommendations from the last electoral review in 2016 included the following comments:

As stated earlier, given the unique nature of the authority, it is not possible to both minimise variances and reflect the distinct nature of the island communities that make up the council.

We have concluded it is essential to maintain specific 'off-island' representation to respect the distinct communities that live there and their individual needs and characteristics. We consider that combining the smaller islands together in a single ward to minimise the electoral variances would not reflect community identities or provide for effective and convenient representation for 'off-island' residents.

We would endorse this position whole heartedly.

Separated from St Mary's and from each other, the off islands form distinct communities. Travelling by boat is the only way to move between the islands. Out of season (i.e. November to March) the off islands are particularly isolated due to the limited number of scheduled boat services.

Each off island:

- has its own community centre or island hall which acts as a focal point for community activities.
- has its own grocery store and post office.
- has its own Anglican church (with St Martin's also having its own Methodist church).
- has its own Facebook group for residents (although the Tresco group is defined as a staff noticeboard and includes staff from Hell Bay Hotel on Bryher which is owned by Tresco Estate).

In some cases, there are closer links between Tresco and Bryher reflecting their close proximity:

- St Martin's and St Agnes have their own primary school bases while there is a combined base for Tresco and Bryher on Tresco.
- St Martin's and St Agnes have their own pilot gig rowing clubs while there is a combined club for Tresco and Bryher.
- St Martin's and St Agnes have their own cricket teams while there is a combined team for Tresco and Bryher.
- As mentioned above, Tresco Estate owns and operates Hell Bay Hotel on Bryher.

Nevertheless Tresco and Bryher are still very much distinct communities, not least because Tresco is leased in its entirety by a single family and practically all residents of that island are employees of Tresco Estate.

Even if one were minded to push the case for a combined Tresco and Bryher ward (which we believe would be a mistake), there would be no rationale for a combined St Martin's and St Agnes ward. The two islands lie at opposite ends of the group and are the greatest distance apart of any two of the inhabited islands.

In our opinion, combining the off islands into a single ward or into two wards would not reflect community identity and interests. Furthermore we believe it would work against the delivery of effective and convenient local government. Given the geographical separation of the off islands, a councillor would be unable to move freely around their ward and it would be difficult to represent adequately the different communities within its boundaries. As mentioned in the council size submission, much of the representational role of councillors is carried out as a result of informal conversations arising from day-to-day encounters in the community. A councillor living on one island would not have this sort of regular contact with residents living on another island.

Ultimately therefore we agree with the LGBCE final recommendations from 2016 that 'each island should have its own elected member to ensure that all communities are effectively represented on the council'.

St Mary's representation

The 12-member ward for St Mary's is very much an anomaly in English local government.

The LGBCE member briefing for this review states:

There is no limit, in law, to the number of councillors that can be elected to represent a ward. In most reviews, as a matter of policy, the Commission will not accept a proposal for more than three councillors to represent a ward. We recognise that St Mary's currently has more than three councillors.

Leaving aside the Council of the Isles of Scilly and the City of London, we are not aware of any ward for an English principal area local authority having more than three members. The City of London ward with the highest number of representatives is Farringdon Without which has 10 Common Councillors and 1 Alderman.

Clearly it would be possible to divide St Mary's into four wards electing three members each – but this would not reflect local identity. St Mary's is one community, not four communities. Given its village-sized population, this is not surprising. There is:

- one school
- one health centre
- one integrated hospital and care home facility

- one leisure centre
- one main shopping area including the only supermarket
- one museum and cultural centre (currently under construction).

The main Sunday morning church services (Anglican, Methodist and Catholic) all take place in Hugh Town. (There is also an Anglican service on Sunday evenings at Old Town church but only during the holiday season.)

Most tellingly of all, perhaps, there are no community groups or sports groups which cover only part of the island.

In our opinion, dividing St Mary's into four wards would not reflect community identity and interests. Furthermore we believe it would work against the delivery of effective and convenient local government. There can be little doubt that sub-dividing St Mary's would result in boundaries which were less clear and less identifiable – and which made less sense on the map and on the ground.

Our firm view therefore is that we should retain the current arrangements whereby St Mary's is a single ward. We accept this creates an anomalous situation in terms of the number of councillors it has – but given how different the Council of the Isles of Scilly is from other principal area local authorities, anomalies are probably to be expected.

Number of St Mary's councillors

If it is accepted that (i) the total number of councillors should remain about the same, (ii) the off islands should continue to have their own representation and (iii) St Mary's should remain as a single ward, it follows necessarily that each off island should have one councillor and the remainder should be allocated to St Mary's. The only remaining question is the precise number of St Mary's councillors.

As mentioned previously, Appendix 1 shows the electoral variances under the current arrangements for the electorates in 2026, 2031 (forecast), 2025 and 2024. It also shows the electoral variances if the number of members for St Mary's is increased or decreased by 1 or 2 for the same years. A summary of the results is provided in Appendix 2.

If the objective were to optimise for the number of individual parishes with good electoral equality, a case could be made for reducing the number of St Mary's councillors:

- with 14 members for St Mary's, there would be one parish with good electoral equality in 2026, 2031 and 2025 and two in 2024;
- with 13 members for St Mary's, there would be two parishes with good electoral equality in 2031, 2025 and 2024 and one in 2026;
- with 12 members for St Mary's (i.e. the current arrangement), there are two parishes with good electoral equality for each of the four years in question;

- with 11 members for St Mary's, there would be three parishes with good electoral equality in 2026 and 2031 and two in 2025 and 2024; and
- with 10 members for St Mary's, there would be three parishes with good electoral equality in 2026 and 2025 and two in 2031 and 2024.

Conversely, if the objective were to optimise for reducing the number of individual parishes with a variance more than 30% from the average, a case could be made for increasing the number of St Mary's councillors:

- with 14 members for St Mary's, there would be no parishes with a variance more than 30% from the average in 2026, 2031 and 2024 and one in 2025;
- with 13 members for St Mary's, there would be no parishes with a variance more than 30% from the average in 2031 and 2024 and two in 2026 and 2025;
- with 12 members for St Mary's (i.e. the current arrangement), there is one parish with a variance more than 30% from the average for each of the four years in question;
- with 11 members for St Mary's, there would be two parishes with a variance more than 30% from the average in 2026 and 2024 and one in 2031 and 2025; and
- with 10 members for St Mary's, there would be two parishes with a variance more than 30% from the average for each of the four years in question.

Ultimately the situation is marginal and we feel the current arrangement with 12 members for St Mary's is an acceptable compromise.

Final proposal

Our final proposal is for no change to the warding arrangements for the Council of the Isles of Scilly, i.e. we recommend there should be four single-member wards for the off islands and one 12-member ward for St Mary's.