



COUNCIL - 6TH OCTOBER 2015

SUBJECT: WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON DRAFT DIRECTIONS TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES

REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report the proposals contained in the Welsh Government Draft Directions to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales (LGBC) consultation report (attached at appendix 1) and seek Members views to enable the Council to respond to the consultation exercise. The report proposes changes to the total number of councillors to be elected to each county and county borough councils at future elections.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The LGBC has a statutory duty to carry out periodic reviews of the electoral arrangements for each county and county borough council in Wales. The way the LGBC conducts an electoral review is defined by legislation and Directions issued by Welsh Ministers.
- 2.2 On 17 June 2015, the Welsh Minister for Public Services published a map of proposed new local authority areas based on the Welsh Government's preferred configuration for the future of local authorities in Wales, including the two options for North Wales. The map forms the basis of the Draft Directions to the Commission. Welsh Government are not seeking views about the map in this consultation; that opportunity will arise during a consultation on a Draft Local Government Bill planned for the autumn.
- 2.3 The Local Government (Wales) Bill 2015 is currently being considered by the National Assembly for Wales. The provisions of the Bill allow for preparatory work to enable a programme of local government mergers and reform. This includes giving the Welsh Ministers powers to direct LGBC to conduct initial reviews of the electoral arrangements for the proposed new local authority areas. This will allow the LGBC as much time as possible to complete its reviews and for electoral arrangements to be made for the elections to Shadow Authorities in 2019.
- 2.3 Welsh Government is proposing to remove the cap on the maximum number of councillors per authority in recognition of the larger populations and geographical areas which the new councils will cover. There is no proposal to specify a minimum or maximum number of councillors per local authority. Instead, the Draft Directions specify that the number of councillors should be no smaller than the number produced by a councillor to elector ratio of one councillor to every 4,000 electors.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The electoral arrangements determined by the Welsh Government will directly affect the number of Members elected to the Council.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The directions begin with the LGBC for Wales conducting an initial review during which they must have regard to the following;
- 4.1.1 The particular characteristics of an area and the extent to which those characteristics should influence the size of the ward and the number of electors within it;
- 4.1.2 The following principles—
- (i) existing electoral wards should be grouped together in groups of two or more to create proposed electoral wards;
 - (ii) a Welsh language name for each electoral ward should be recommended and, where there is not a generally accepted Welsh language name for an electoral ward, an English language equivalent should be recommended;
 - (iii) the number of councillors for a proposed principal area should be no smaller than the number produced by a councillor to elector ratio of 1:4000; and
 - (iv) the number of councillors for a particular proposed principal area should be no smaller than the number of councillors for another proposed principal area which has a smaller electorate.
- 4.2 The WLGA are currently preparing a response to the consultation. They have confirmed that early feedback suggests that in addition to the issues of the potential size of some new wards and the number of councillors in some councils, there is a particular concern about the implication of the Direction stating that new wards should be based on a grouping of 2 or more existing wards.
- 4.3 The grouping of 2 or more existing wards presents a number of challenges. Some existing wards may already have the appropriate 1:4,000 ratio, but the direction appears to preclude them from continuing in their current form. Merging 2 or more existing wards will mean it will be difficult for LGBC to achieve its main statutory aim (as per the current Local Government Bill) of achieving consistency/parity of councillor: elector ratios across a new principal council area. Merging 2 or more existing wards in an arbitrary approach may run counter to the main direction that LGBC should follow which is to take into account the 'particular characteristics of an area' when creating new wards.
- 4.4 The proposal would give the current Caerphilly County Borough Council area approximately 32 Councillors for 132,157 electors. This is a substantial reduction from the current 73 Councillors and some of the challenges set out in paragraph 4.3 above would apply in this area.
- 4.5 The WLGA have provided the information in the table below to show the current and proposed Councillor numbers.

Merging Authorities	Total electors (2015 local government electorate figures)	Total Electors for Proposed new Council	Minimum Number of Councillors for Proposed new Council (based on ration of 1:4,000)	Current Councillor Numbers
Blaenau Gwent	51,987			
Caerphilly	132,157			
Torfaen	70,073			
Newport	107,135			
Monmouthshire	73,180	434,532	109	250
Blaenau Gwent	51,987			
Wales	2,311,451		616	1248
Average Size Council			77	

- 4.6 The timescale for the mergers and initial reviews are challenging and are set out below based on the latest available information.

9th November 2015	Consultation closes on draft Directions to Boundary Commission regarding Initial Reviews
November 2015	Local Government (Wales) Bill receives Royal Assent
November 2015	Further brief consultation on final draft Directions to Boundary Commission regarding Initial Reviews
January/February 2016	Directions to the Boundary Commission are formally 'made' (within 2 months of the Directions being made)
March/April 2016	Boundary Commission publishes a timetable for the programme of initial reviews
Spring 2016	Boundary Commission develops and consults on its 'Policy and Practice' (as per S19(2) of the Local Government (Wales) Bill 2015)
Early Summer 2016	Boundary Commission publishes its final 'Policy and Practice' and begins initial reviews, probably on a phased approach (with North Wales likely to be later in the timetable until WG confirms whether there will be 2 or 3 councils in North Wales)
By 31st July 2018	Boundary Commission submits reports to Ministers on initial reviews

- 4.7 The Welsh Government consultation report makes proposals which are subject to consultation until 9th November 2015. Following consideration of any consultation responses, the Welsh Government will issue the directions. Members can also submit individual response to the consultation.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no equalities implications as a result of this report.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no personnel implications arising from this report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 There are no consultation responses which have not been incorporated into the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Members are asked to note the ongoing consultation.

- 9.2 Whilst noting that Members can submit individual responses to Welsh Government, that the Chief Executive formally consult with the Leaders of the Political groupings within the Council and prepare and submit a response to Welsh Government on behalf of the Council by the 9th November 2015.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To provide a response on behalf of the Council to Welsh Government.

11. STATUTORY POWERS

- 11.1 Local Government Act 1972.

Author: Angharad Price, Interim Head of Democratic Services
Consultees: Chris Burns, Interim Chief Executive
Nicole Scammell, Acting Director of Corporate Services
Gail Williams, Interim Head of Legal Service/Monitoring Officer
Dave Beecham, Electoral Services Manager

Background papers:

Report to Council on 21 April 2015 Welsh Government White Paper, Reforming Local Government, Power to Local People

Appendices:

Welsh Government Consultation document