

Electoral Review of Denbighshire: Recommendations and Summary of Discussions of a Member Working Group to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales

1 Background

The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (the Commission) were undertaking Electoral Reviews of all 22 Local Authorities in Wales, beginning in January 2017 with final recommendations to be presented to the Welsh Government to approve changes in time for the 2022 local government elections. Representatives from the Commission had met with the Leader, Group Leaders and officers in September 2017 prior to attending a full Council meeting in October to present information on the policy and practice for electoral reviews and specifically to cover how these would shape Denbighshire's Electoral Review.

A working group of members agreed with the Group Leaders was established to consider Denbighshire's Electoral Review which met on the 22 November. Issues that were not resolved at that meeting were brought to a further meeting held on the 16 January 2018.

2 Criteria, Scope and Consultation Responses

The working group were reminded of the role of the Commission and the legislative background for the programme of reviews taking place across Wales. The statutory criteria covered electoral equality (the optimum number of electors per councillor), community identity and effective and convenient local government arrangements (e.g. coherent electoral wards with common interests). An electoral review may consider:

- The number of members on the Council
- The boundaries of the electoral wards
- The number of members to be elected for any electoral ward
- The name of any electoral ward

For Denbighshire:

- The Commission's council size aim for Denbighshire was for a council of 47 members though an increase or decrease of 1 member could be acceptable.
- The Commission would be using communities and community wards as the primary building blocks making up electoral wards (Wales is divided into community areas, many of which have town or community councils as is the case in Denbighshire).
- The Commission's preference was for single member wards but they would consider up to 3 members per ward in cases where this was supported by evidence to the character of a ward or in the interests of electoral parity.
- Electoral parity for Denbighshire had been defined as 1 councillor to 1,623 electors with any variance being as close as possible to this figure.

- If proposals were made to the Commission that were at odds with the review's criteria these proposals would have to be supported by good evidence that they were the best options available
- Transfers of wards or areas between Denbighshire and any of its neighbouring authorities would not be permitted under the rules of the review.
- The Commission had provided a colour coded map of Denbighshire indicating the existing variance in electoral representation in each ward i.e. how close each county council ward was to having a councillor / electorate ratio of 1:1623. The areas coloured orange or hatched-orange were those that the Commission had highlighted as being areas of concern.
- The Commission's deadline for responses was the 23 January 2018.
- The role of the working group was to see whether there was broad agreement to making a Denbighshire County Council consultation response. If the working group could not agree on a single Denbighshire a summary of the views put forward could be given to the Commission. Individual members would still be able to make their own responses to the Commission.

As a result of the information provided by the Commission the working group confined its deliberations to the 5 electoral divisions which had a variance of between 25% and 50% above or below the county average. The Commission is recommended to retain the existing warding arrangements for the other electoral divisions.

3 Rhyl South East

This electoral division currently was 28% above the county average and the five year projected forecast was for the electorate to rise further. At the November meeting the working group decided to recommend that it be split into 2 new electoral divisions based on the component Rhyl Town Council wards of Trellewelyn and Tynewydd. With 2 members for each new division the variance figures for both the current and 5 year forecast would be improved and both wards would be within 10% of the county average in 5 years' time.

Local member Councillor Blakeley reported that Rhyl Town Council had drawn the same conclusions and felt that the electorate would be familiar with the changes as they were in place at the town council level. The Town Council had made its representations to the Commission.

RECOMMENDED –

- (i) That the Rhyl South East division be split into 2 new electoral divisions based and named on the component Rhyl Town Council wards of Trellewelyn and Tynewydd. With 2 members for each new division.**
- (ii) That the Commission consider renaming the remaining divisions in Rhyl (eg Rhyl South, Rhyl West, etc) in favour of using geographical rather than 'compass' based names.**
- (iii) That the Commission consult with interested parties on proposals to rename electoral divisions in Rhyl.**

4 Llanarmon yn Iâl / Llandegla

Local member Councillor Holland reported that all 3 of the community councils within the Llanarmon yn Iâl / Llandegla electoral division had carefully considered the Commission's policy and criteria.

They were however all agreed that the current arrangements should be maintained in the interests of the 3 communities' shared geographical and historical links. All 3 were part of the Alyn Valley with a common hill-farming connection and close historic industrial and quarrying links that brought the communities together. Whilst the communities had considered whether the Llanferres community should join with Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd / Llangynhafal in order to reduce the variance from the county average, all the communities felt that Llanferres was a part of the Alyn Valley and very different from Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd on the other side of the Clwydian Hills.

The working group agreed with the representations made by the communities.

RECOMMENDED –

- (i) That the Llanarmon yn Iâl / Llandegla electoral divisions should remain unchanged owing to the close geographical and historical links and the wishes of the communities expressed by the 3 community councils.**
- (ii) That the name of the electoral division be changed to *Dyffryn Alun / Alyn Valley*.**

5 Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd / Llangynhafal

This electoral division was currently 26% below the county average and proposals were discussed by the working group to incorporate the Llanferres community from the Llanarmon yn Iâl / Llandegla electoral division.

The working group had opposed this incorporation owing to the views of the communities based on the close ties between the Llanferres, Llanarmon yn Iâl and Llandegla communities.

Whilst the merger would have produced an electoral division with an improved variance from the county average (+14%) the 5 year forecast would raise this variance to +20%.

RECOMMENDED –

That the Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd / Llangynhafal electoral division should remain unchanged owing to the effects incorporating possible neighbouring communities would have on those communities and the projected increase in the electorate in Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd / Llangynhafal over the next 5 years.

6 Llandrillo

Local member Councillor ap Gwynfor advised the working group the Llandrillo division contained the Llandrillo and Cynwyd communities. Neither of the community councils had a clerk at present so they were experiencing difficulties responding to official consultations. Councillor ap Gwynfor reported that the local view appeared to be in favour of the advantages of having a single county councillor to represent them in terms of being easy to know who to approach.

The working group referred to Llandrillo's position adjoining Denbighshire's Corwen electoral division at one end and bordering the neighbouring authorities of Wrexham, Powys and Gwynedd at every other point. Recognising that Llandrillo's electorate was 41% below the county average the working group considered a proposal to merge the Llandrillo and Corwen divisions and create a single two member ward. In favour of this proposal was the reduction in variance to between -13 and - 11 %.

The local member for Corwen, Councillor Jones reported that the communities in Corwen held similar views to those expressed by Councillor ap Gwynfor; favouring the retention of a single member ward for Corwen.

The working group considered the characteristics of Llandrillo and Corwen electoral divisions. Both divisions covered large areas; both being amongst the largest geographic sized divisions in the county. Llandrillo was a rural division whilst Corwen was framed around an urban town. Members agreed that the communities in the eastern part of Corwen such as Glyndyfrdwy, looked primarily east to Llangollen as its natural hub whilst those in Llandrillo looked west to Bala in Gwynedd. Members agreed that an amalgamated division would be a very large and disparate entity and difficult for two members to represent effectively if both had to cover the entire area.

Acknowledging the administrative difficulties that the absence of a clerk for both the Llandrillo and Cynwyd communities presented the working group concluded that Llandrillo's location and community ties strongly favoured retaining the existing Llandrillo electoral division and that this viewpoint would be supported within the communities of Llandrillo, Cynwyd and Corwen.

RECOMMENDED –

That the Llandrillo electoral division should remain unchanged for the reasons outlined above.

7 Denbigh Upper / Henllan

The town and surrounding neighbourhoods of Denbigh were divided into 3 electoral divisions. Denbigh Central, Denbigh Lower and Denbigh Upper / Henllan. Denbigh Upper / Henllan had been flagged for attention by the Commission as it was 26% under the county average. The working group considered a proposal to create a new 3 member division by amalgamating Denbigh Central with Denbigh Upper / Henllan which would produce a variance of -17% now and -14% in 5 years ' time.

Local member Councillor Swingler was not against the proposal though he raised concerns that the voice of the distinctive, largely rural community of Henllan could be weakened further if the urban Denbigh Central became part of the division.

Local member Councillor Kensler strongly favoured the 1 member 1 ward approach and this would be lost to Denbigh Central by the creation of a new 3 member ward. She also advised that plans were being developed for some significant potential residential developments that might not yet be advanced enough to provide figures for the 5 year forecast.

Local member Councillor Lloyd-Williams was not opposed to the idea of a 3 member ward and raised queries around whether there were solutions to the representational issues rural Henllan would face if it was part of an increasingly urban division.

The working group were advised that the electorate figures for Denbigh Central itself could be higher than it was. A large number of residential units in some areas of the division were home to non-qualifying nationals.

Members probed options for merging the Henllan community with Trefnant but concluded that, given Henllan's location bordering with Conwy, this could only successfully result in improving electoral variance figures by breaking up some of the existing communities, which would be contrary to the Commission's guidelines.

RECOMMENDED –

That the Denbigh Upper / Henllan electoral division should remain unchanged for the reasons outlined below:

- **Mergers would increase the number of members representing an electoral division.**
- **The incorporation of Denbigh Central would result in the loss of a single member ward.**
- **The location alongside Conwy of Denbigh Upper / Henllan restricted the possibilities to reorganise the divisions without breaking up communities.**
- **A combined Denbigh Upper / Henllan and Denbigh Central ward would detrimentally affect the representation of rural Henllan.**
- **Denbigh was expecting to see plans emerge for large residential developments. Information on the impact of these prospective developments should be awaited before re-organising the warding arrangements in the area.**