

Report To: County Council

Date of Meeting: 10th July 2012

Lead Member / Officer:

Report Author: Gary Williams – Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Title: Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales – Council Size Policy Consultation Paper

1. What is the report about?

1.1 The report is about the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales' consultation paper in respect of its Council Size Policy.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales (the Commission) is consulting on policy proposals to introduce council size as 'the starting point in any electoral review'. The Commission has requested that responses to the consultation be returned to them by 16th July 2012. The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval of the proposed response.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1 That Council approves the submission of the draft consultation response shown at Appendix 4 (to follow).

4. Report details

4.1 The Commission is required to carry out periodic reviews of the electoral arrangements of the twenty two unitary authorities in Wales.

4.2 The Commission uses the term 'Council size' to describe the total number of councillors to be elected to the Council.

4.3 Council size is the starting point of any review. The Commission considers that without having the optimum number of electors per councillor it cannot consider the patterns of electoral divisions.

4.4 The Commission considers that council size is an important part of identifying an electoral scheme that provides for effective and convenient local government. The right number of members will provide the basis for the Council to conduct its business in the most effective way.

4.5 The Commission considers that there is a benefit in considering how council size is established as a general principle outside the remit of a specific review.

4.6 The consultation paper sets out a process for establishing council size.

- 4.7 The Commission intends to adopt a banding approach that groups similar authorities together and identifies a council size dependent on the band.
- 4.8 The Commission proposes four categories, Rural, Urban, Valley and Other. These groups are set out in Appendix 1.
- 4.9 The Commission has calculated a council size proposal for each authority. The Commission does not intend to use this prescriptively and considers a size of plus or minus three from the proposed figure to be satisfactory. The Commission intends to have discussions with each authority under review. Those discussions may persuade the Commission to adopt a council size beyond plus or minus three.
- 4.10 The proposals for council size contained in the paper are set out in Appendix 2. Denbighshire has been placed in the Rural category with a proposed Council size of 43 councillors.

- 4.11 The Commission considers that the authorities should have a council size that provides for member elector ratios as follows;

Rural	1	:	1,750
Urban	1	:	2,500
Valley	1	:	2,350
Other	1	:	1,850

- 4.121 The Commission considers that before taking any decisions on electoral schemes it should understand the role of councillors in the area that it is reviewing and how these roles fit together within a particular authority in order to determine how many members the authority needs. This understanding would be used in conjunction with the banding approach.
- 4.13 The Commission will also consider Minister's Directive 2009 which states that the aim should be to achieve electoral divisions with a councillor to electorate ratio of no lower than 1:1,750.
- 4.14 In addition to considering the banding approach and the discussion with the council the Commission will consider the geographic composition of the area. The size of communities and community wards will continue to be a factor in identifying a council size that will provide for divisions that can be based on the communities.
- 4.15 The Commission's procedure for conducting an electoral review requires that the Commission members and officials will meet members and senior officers of the council in advance of the review to discuss procedure and data requirements. The Commission suggests that at these meetings the issue of council size should also be addressed. Group Leaders should give their views on what membership is appropriate, in the interest of how the council works.
- 4.16 Following these discussions the commission will agree on council size at a formal commission meeting and subsequently inform those interested parties what the size is, in order that those parties may contribute to the review and submit a scheme to the Commission based on the agreed council size.

4.17 The Commission seeks consultation responses to the questions posed by it in the consultation paper which are set out at Appendix 3.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

5.1 This is a consultation response in respect of a paper produced by the Commission. The response will not directly impact upon the corporate priorities.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1 The response will not have any direct cost. The consultation is about a policy to be adopted by the Commission. Any future determinations of electoral reviews conducted by the Commission may affect the total amount spent on member salaries.

7. What consultations have been carried out?

7.1 The Consultation Paper has been circulated to Group Leaders with a request that their Groups' views be provided in advance of the meeting of Council in order that a draft response, incorporating those views, may be prepared for Council as Appendix 4 (to follow).

8. Chief Finance Officer Statement

There are no direct cost implications from this report, however should the proposed changes go ahead, this will have a small financial impact.

9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

9.1 Failure to provide a consultation response may lead the Commission to decide upon its Council Size Policy without taking into account the views of Council.

10. Power to make the Decision

Section 111 Local Government Act 1972.