

Response to Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales' consultation on its approach to council size.

1. Do you consider that outlining a detailed approach to adopting a particular council size is helpful?

The Council feels that it is helpful to outline the approach in detail.

2. Do you think that the principle of banding is useful when considering council size?

The principle of banding is partially useful in that it avoids a one size fits all approach to widely dissimilar authority areas, however even within the proposed banding areas there are significant differences from one authority to another which should mitigate against a rigid interpretation based on numbers alone. Care needs to be taken with areas of scarcity not to create overly large geographical wards.

The geographical areas of some of the wards could be quite extensive with some being five miles wide by nine miles long. Some rural County Councillors currently have three or four Community Councils which they are expected to attend. Contrast this with the roles of County Councillors in more urban areas. The Councillor is the link for communities. The question of rurality must be addressed, especially transport problems and the greater need for car travel. Sustainability and the environment seem absent from this paper. Whichever band a Council is placed in common problems will remain, such as there being enough Councillors with time and commitment to carry out the non executive function. These proposals will disadvantage councillors representing rural wards.

3. Do you think the four categories of 'urban', 'rural', 'valley' and 'other' are appropriate? Do you think that each authority has been allocated to the relevant category?

Taking into account the comments above, we believe that broadly speaking most authorities are in the right banding, however, ensuring that there is the correct representation for electors taking into account historical, geographical and topographical factors should be given pre-eminence over a rigid numerical calculation. The ratio was the only factor to be considered in the proposals of the former Commissioners and this resulted in ward proposals where totally unrelated communities were grouped together for no other reason than the number added up.

4. Do you think that the councillor:elector ratio for each category of authorities is appropriate? If not, what ratio is better and why?

With regards to the ratios, in order to allow for the disparities between areas it would be better to have a range of ratio within each banding e.g. Rural from 1500 to 1850; Urban from 2200 to 2750; Valleys from 2000 to 2500; Others from 1750 to 2250. This would better allow for vagaries of geography and a ratio that served all the community needs.

5. Do you think it is helpful for the Commission and Council to have detailed discussions at the start of the review process about what the council size should be?

We certainly think it helpful for there to be full dialogue with all authorities at every stage of the process and for the Commission not to be imposing on local government but working with them. It is difficult to see how this could be done in any other way.

6. Do you agree that the areas of council business identified in paragraph 48 of this consultation document are all pertinent issues, relevant to council size?

We agree with the areas highlighted in paragraph 48 however some Members of the Council were concerned about the role of multiple councillors per ward and felt that there should be wards which allowed for representation by one councillor per ward as this would improve transparency and accountability. Other Members were of the view that if the factor listed in paragraph 48 as (c) regarding the representation of the needs and interests of electoral wards were to be considered, then it may be that there would be a need to increase the numbers of councillors to meet the needs of individual constituents.

7. Do you consider there should be a range of council sizes for authorities to fall between? Do you think 30 to 75 is an appropriate range?

The range of council size between 30 and 75 members seem acceptable although in the case of Cardiff there will always be a disparity in size of member ratio and perhaps an exception in the upper limit would be merited.

8. Do you consider there should be a councillor:elector ratio for authorities to aim towards? Should it be different for different authorities?

Having a target to aim for in terms of a ratio is perfectly acceptable but the number should not be the starting point for seeking to reduce the number of elected members. There should indeed be different targets from one council to another as each council covers widely different geographical and population areas and stringent recourse to a hard and fast ratio does not make for good locality work.

There needs to be an understanding of the needs of the community and the workload that will be placed on members. There should be sufficient councillors to fulfil all of the roles required to service the Council. The separation of executive and non executive roles means that fewer members are available for scrutiny functions.

9. If the proposals contained in this Policy are accepted by the Minister, do you consider that the current Directions are needed? If you are in favour of the Direction, please give the reasons for your view.

We do not believe that that Minister needs to give any directions regarding this review.

We need much more consultation with elected members if we are to favour any direction we need to be content it's for the benefit of the electorate not the council or the government.

In addition to answering the set questions, the following issues have been raised by members as ones to be considered:

As in urban areas, the principal authority review cannot change existing community council ward areas, it may be appropriate to consider whether these "building block" areas are correct before artificially combining them to reach an arbitrarily arrived at ratio.

With regards to multi member wards, there was mixed feeling. Generally it was thought that in rural wards single member wards were more representative, however in urban wards some members feel that it is appropriate to have multi member wards however perhaps no more than 2 members per ward would be the best solution.

Other members felt that multi member wards are inefficient and that having multiple councillors per ward is very ineffective, inefficient and does not allow for transparency or accountability. E.g.: a resident will contact all three councillors of her/his ward and these three councillors will then make representations to one officer who must then respond to these three councillors. Some members question the efficiency of this and also the accountability. Which councillor made a difference to the life of this resident?

Proposals by the last Commission to create "super wards" with 7500 electors represented by 4 members, whilst meeting the arbitrary ratio would result in each member in practice having to represent 7500 electors and not 1750 which it is felt is unmanageable.

Members also expressed the view that the Commission's consideration and discussions with each authority about Council size should take into account potential future expansion. Factors to be taken into account in this regard include the housing need figures identified in a Local Development Plan which give an indication of likely growth in the number of electors.

It is also felt, referring to paragraphs 48-50 of the consultation paper that the commission should bear in mind that the role of a councillor is becoming ever more demanding and that the increasingly complex environment in which councils and their members operate increases the demands on their time.