

<u>BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL</u>	
Report to	The Chair and Members of The Democratic Services Committee
Report Subject	A Review of Electoral Arrangements in Blaenau Gwent A Consultation by The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales
Report Author	Andrea Jones Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
Report date	7th February 2018
Directorate	Resources
Executive Portfolio	Leader / Executive Member Corporate Services
Date of meeting	20th February 2018
Date signed off by Monitoring Officer	7th February 2018
Date signed off by Section 151 Officer	N/A
Date signed off by Chair	7th February 2018
Key words	Consultation Review of Electoral Arrangements The Local Government and Boundary Commission for Wales Decrease in number of councillors. Review of wards Boundary changes First consultation period ending 27th March 2018

Report Information Summary

1.	Purpose of Report
1.1	To outline proposals for a reduction in the number of councillors and electoral wards, and revised ward boundaries. If Council agree the proposals they will be submitted to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales by 27 th March 2018, on behalf of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. The proposals have been developed by a Task and Finish Group set up for the purpose of reviewing the current boundaries.
2.	Scope of the Report
2.1	The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales is at the first stage of a consultation on the review of electoral arrangements in Blaenau Gwent. This consultation is in accordance with the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013. It is proposed that the new arrangements will be in place by the next local elections in 2022.
2.2	As part of the consultation process, the Council has been encouraged by the Commission to submit a proposal for consideration. This gives the Council an opportunity to use the local knowledge of its Elected Members to achieve the best arrangements for the Council.
2.3.	A Task and Finish group was set up to review the current arrangements. The group consisted of a member from each of the current 16 electoral wards, and also election officers who advised and supported the discussions.
2.4	The proposal, or amended proposal, of the Task and Finish Group for revised electoral arrangements will be submitted to Council for consideration on 22 nd March 2018.
1	Contribution to the National Well-Being Goals – Detail attached as Appendix 1
3.1	A resilient Wales. Support citizens to take an active role and empowered role in their communities to provide resilience
4.	Recommendation(s) / Endorsement by other groups, e.g. CLT/Committees/Other groups
4.1	The revised proposals have been submitted to Corporate

	Leadership Team for information only.
5.	Recommendation/s for Consideration
5.1	<p>To consider and agree the following proposals of the Task and Finish Group:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A reduction in the number of councillors from 42 to 34 from 2022. 2. A reduction in electoral wards from 16 to 14 wards. (see Appendix C) 3. Revised boundaries for each of the 14 electoral wards as shown on the maps. Maps to be circulated prior to the meeting.
5.2	That the proposal be submitted to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission of Wales by 27 th March 2017. The evidence and reasons for the proposal will also be submitted as part of the proposal.

Why this topic is a priority for the Council?							
Single Integrated Plan (SIP)	Council's Well-being Objectives	Performance Management Improvement Framework (PMIF)	Transforming Blaenau Gwent (TBG Programme)	Relevant legislation	Other (please state)		
				Section 29 and 30 of The Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013	Consultation		
Reporting Pathway							
Directorate Management Team (DMT)	Corporate Leadership Team (CLT)	Audit	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny	Executive	Council	Other (please state)
√ Resources DMT For info - virtually	√ For Info - TBA		√ 20 th Feb 2018			√ 22 nd March 2017	

Main Report

1.	Background and Context
1.1	On 23 June 2016 the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government published a Written Statement asking the Commission to recommence its 10 year programme with an expectation that a review of all 22 electoral areas be completed in time for the new arrangements to be put into place for the 2022 local government elections
1.2	Section 29 of the Act places a duty upon the Commission to review the electoral arrangements for each principal area at least once every ten years.
1.3	<p>The “electoral arrangements” of a principal area are defined in Section 29 (9) of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 and sets out what will be considered as part of the review:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the number of members of the council for the principal area;• the number, type and boundaries of the electoral wards into which the principal area is for the time being divided for the purpose for the election of members;• the number of members to be elected for any electoral ward in the principal area;• the name of any electoral ward
1.4	The Boundary Commission has carried out some initial work on the review, and taking into account matters such as the urban nature and population density (persons per hectare), their initial proposal is that the number of Councillors in Blaenau Gwent could be reduced from 42 to 38. (Refer to Electoral Reviews: Council Size document for evidence.)
1.5	A Task and Finish Group was set up comprising a councillor from each of the 16 electoral wards, and membership was based on the proportionality of political parties in the Council.
1.6	The members of the group were in agreement with decreasing

	<p>the number of councillors, and by more than the Commission's suggestion of 38. The number of councillors has always been raised as a concern in public consultations, and this proposal will demonstrate that the Council is listening to residents' views.</p>
1.7	<p>The first proposal of the group is that the number of councillors in Blaenau Gwent decrease from 42 to 34 or thereabouts. Members were of the opinion that the resourcing of committees, scrutiny and constituency work could still be managed effectively with 34 members.</p>
1.8	<p>When reviewing ward sizes, the three valleys of Tredegar, Ebbw Vale, Nantyglo, Blaina, Brynmawr, and Abertillery were viewed as separate identities. Brynmawr, Nantyglo and Blaina were viewed separately from Abertillery. There are no strong community ties from valley to valley and therefore wards merged from valley to valley were not considered.</p>
1.9	<p>The principles of this review were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Electoral parity - the overriding principle• A reduction in councillors to 34 members or thereabouts. (The required ratio for 34 councillors was calculated as 1 councillor for every 1501 electors).• To keep within 10% of this figure as far as is possible.• No single member wards• No wards of more than 3 members• Natural boundaries to be used as far as possible.• Ward boundaries should not be revised unless necessary.• Wards cannot be revised by making small boundary changes (Commission instruction)• Wards should have one name preferably, which ideally should be bilingual• To gain the agreement of the Task and Finish Group for proposed revised electoral arrangements• Submit only one scheme for consideration by Council because of the deadline for responses set by the Commission, and the detailed work involved.
2.0	<p>The Commission and members of the group did not support single member wards, as if a ward member was ill or on holiday then there would be no alternative available representative for</p>

	<p>the constituents of the ward. In multi member wards councillors support each other in dealing with local issues, and share the constituency work. For first time councillors having another ward member to share constituency work and ideas is important.</p> <p>2.11 The electoral boundaries have been reviewed to produce electoral parity i.e. similar number of electors per councillor throughout the Borough. See appendix A and B for comparison of existing and proposed wards. For the revision of wards natural boundaries were used. The document Electoral Reviews: Council Size has been used as the guideline for this review. All of the proposed wards are within 10% of the required number or electors of 1501 for 34 councillors with the exception of two wards.</p> <p>2.12 In the proposal the number of electoral wards will be reduced from 16 to 14. Badminton and Six Bells Wards have been merged into other wards. Appendix C demonstrates the changes from a 42 to a 34 council.</p> <p>2.13 The report and proposal, or amended proposal, will be submitted to Council on 22nd March 2018. If the proposal is agreed by Council it will then be submitted to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales by 27th March, the consultation deadline. The proposal will include full details and evidence to support the proposal. The Commission do not have to accept the Council's proposal as drafted and they do have the power to impose an alternative scheme without the Council's consent. However, they are likely to try to compromise on issues and try to agree any alternative proposals, and will only seek to impose alternatives as a last resort. It will reflect very positively upon this Council if it is able to agree a single proposal which is in accordance with the Commission's principles.</p>
2.	Performance Evidence and Information
2.1	Appendix A demonstrates the current electoral arrangements in Blaenau Gwent.
2.2	Appendix B shows the ratio per councillor in the proposal of a reduction to 34 members (1 councillor to 1501 electors), and the percentage above or below the required ratio.

2.3	Appendix C shows the revised ward boundaries and former ward boundaries.
3.	Risk Implications
3.1	Unless it receives representations the Boundary Commission will shape the future electoral arrangements in Blaenau Gwent. By submitting a Council proposal the knowledge and wishes of local members will be taken into account.
3.2	The work of the Council, its committees and constituency work has to be carried out effectively. The group are confident that this can be done with the proposed reduction in councillors. It was stated that councillors have some reduction in workload because of the outsourcing of housing and leisure.
4.	Financial Implications
4.1	The proposed reduction in the number of councillors will mean a future reduction in councillor allowances and expenses.
4.2	There will be some financial implications from 2022 because of properties moving to other wards which may be under different town council areas. This may mean a variance in council tax because of varying town council rates.
5.	Staffing/Workforce Development Implications
5.1	There will be some staffing implications with regards to the additional work involved in moving boundaries, polling districts and polling stations. This work will be carried out within existing staffing resources and in advance of the 2022 elections.
6.	Options for Consideration
6.1	There is only one main proposal for a revised scheme for the electoral arrangements for Blaenau Gwent (See Appendices B and C).
6.2	The option is that the Council would consist of 34 councillors – a reduction of 8 (the initial reduction as recommendation by The Commission was 4).
6.3	There will be a reduction from 16 to 14 electoral wards.
6.4	There is no alternative option put forward as the work involved in

	<p>putting forward one option alone is considerable. Also it is suggested that one Council proposal will carry more weight with the Commission.</p>
7.	Impact Assessment Against Proposals / Options
7.1	<p>• Involvement</p> <p>The importance of involving members, officers and consulting with the public to ensure they have an opportunity to shape the future of the Council.</p> <p>The consultation has been widely advertised on the Council's website, council staff magazine, libraries, leisure and community centres. The Commission has also sent out the consultation to the M.P., A.M. and political parties.</p>
7.2	<p>Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)</p> <p>N/A</p>
8.	Conclusion
8.1	<p>It is concluded that the proposed revised electoral arrangements are the best option for this Council for the following reasons:</p>
8.2	<p>The revised wards provide improved electoral parity throughout the County Borough.</p>
8.3	<p>Natural boundaries have been used to revise wards. Wards that have taken in part of other adjoining wards have similar communities. Ward boundaries have not been changed unnecessarily.</p>
8.4	<p>The proposal to reduce councillors by more than the proposal of the Commission demonstrates that members are taking the views of Blaenau Gwent residents into consideration.</p>
8.5	<p>Members are confident that Council committees and constituency work would still be carried out efficiently with the reduction in councillors from 42 to 34. There are no single member wards because of the support ward members provide to each other and the sharing of the constituency work.</p>
8.6	<p>Reducing the number of councillors from 42 to 34 councillors will assist the future budgetary challenges facing the Council.</p>

Assess how well your project / activity will result in multiple benefits for our communities and contribute to the national well-being goals.		
Description of the Well-being goals	How will your project / activity deliver benefits to our communities under the national well-being goals?	Is there anyway to maximise the benefits or minimise any negative impacts to our communities (and the contribution to the national well-being goals)?
<p>A prosperous Wales An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.</p>		
<p>A resilient Wales A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).</p>	<p>Support citizens to take an active role and empowered role in their communities to provide resilience.</p>	
<p>A healthier Wales A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.</p>		

Description of the Well-being goals	How will your project / activity deliver benefits to our communities under the national well-being goals?	Is there anyway to maximise the benefits or minimise any negative impacts to our communities (and the contribution to the national well-being goals)?
<p>A more equal Wales A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).</p>		
<p>A Wales of cohesive communities Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.</p>	<p>The review is to form a new Council by using community wards as building blocks.</p>	
<p>A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.</p>		
<p>A globally responsible Wales A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.</p>		