

LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES



Comisiwn Ffiniau a
Democratiaeth Leol
Cymru



Local Democracy and
Boundary Commission
For Wales

**ELECTORAL REVIEWS:
POLICY AND PRACTICE 2016**

FOREWORD

This is a revised version of our Electoral Reviews: Policy and Practice document that has been updated in preparation of a new programme of electoral reviews. This new programme is as a result of the statement made by the Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government on 23 June 2016.

The Commission is required, before conducting the review, to consult the mandatory consultees on its intended procedure and methodology for the review and in particular, on how it proposes to determine the appropriate number of members for any principal council in the principal area or areas under review.

The Commission has produced this booklet which reaffirms the procedures and methodology we have adopted in respect of electoral reviews the Commission conducts. The booklet also explains how we will be considering the issue of the appropriate number of elected members identified for each principal council.

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The Commission welcomes correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh or English
Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn y Gymraeg.

Background

- 1 The Commission, in order to make recommendations to Welsh Ministers, is required to carry out periodic reviews of the electoral arrangements of principal areas in Wales. The way the Commission conducts a review is defined by legislation and may be guided by directions issued by Welsh Ministers.
- 2 In December 2013 the Commission published its first *Electoral Reviews: Policy and Practice* document, setting out the Commission intended timetable for conducting the reviews of Wales' principal councils; its Council Size policy; and, the policies and procedures that it would apply in the conduct of the reviews.
- 3 On 20 January 2014 the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery reported to the First Minister recommending changes to the make-up and operation of Wales' 22 principal councils. In order to avoid any nugatory work the Commission suspended its electoral review programme.
- 4 On 23 June 2016 the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government published a Written Statement asking the Commission to restart its 10 year programme with a new prioritised timetable with an expectation that all 22 electoral reviews be completed in time for the new arrangements to be put into place for the 2022 local government elections. The Written Statement can be found in full at Appendix 4.
- 5 This revised Electoral Reviews: Policy and Practice document sets out the Commission's new prioritised timetable, updated council size policy and the policies and procedures that will be applied in order to meet the obligations as set out in legislation and in the Written Statement.

Statutory Requirements

The Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013

- 6 The provisions of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 (the Act) in respect of local government reviews, including electoral reviews, replace the provisions of earlier legislation.
- 7 Section 21(3) of the Act provides that the Commission in carrying out its duties must seek to ensure effective and convenient local government. This is the paramount and primary function of the Commission. One of the duties provided for by the Act is to conduct reviews of the electoral arrangements of principal areas.
- 8 Section 29 of the Act lays upon the Commission the duty to review the electoral arrangements for each principal area at least once every ten years.
- 9 The "electoral arrangements" of a principal area are defined in Section 29 (9) of the Act as:
 - (a) the number of members of the council for the principal area;

- (b) 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;
- (c) the number of members to be elected for any electoral ward in the principal area; and
- (d) the name of any electoral ward.

Considerations for a Review of Principal Area Electoral Arrangements

10 The Commission are required by Section 30 of the Act to:

- (a) seek to ensure that the ratio of local government electors to the number of members of the council to be elected is, as nearly as may be, the same in every electoral ward of the principal area; and
- (b) have regard to:
 - (i) the desirability of fixing boundaries for electoral wards which are and will remain easily identifiable; and
 - (ii) the desirability of not breaking local ties when fixing boundaries for electoral wards.

11 For the purposes of (a) above, account is to be taken of:

- (a) any discrepancy between the number of local government electors and the number of persons that are eligible to be local government electors (as indicated by relevant official statistics); and
- (b) any change to the number or distribution of local government electors in the principal area which is likely to take place in the period of five years immediately following the making of any recommendation.

Consequential Changes

12 Section 29(7) provides that as part of a principal area electoral review the Commission may recommend the following consequential changes:

- (a) such community boundary changes it considers appropriate in relation to any community in the principal area;
- (b) such community council changes and changes to the electoral arrangements for such a community as it considers appropriate; and
- (c) such preserved county changes as it considers appropriate.

Balance

- 13 The legislation requires the Commission to exercise a balanced judgement taking on board all relevant considerations, with a view to making recommendations for electoral arrangements that are to achieve effective and convenient local government. The Commission has a degree of discretion in the way that it attaches weight to the factors that aid it in making its decisions.
- 14 In an ideal situation, it would be possible to devise a pattern of electoral ward boundaries in which all councillors (and electoral wards) in an authority had an equal electoral ratio; brought together people in clearly identifiable communities; demonstrated clearly how local government would be both effective and convenient; *and* had the appropriate number of councillors.
- 15 The geographical, social, economic and administrative make-up of Wales is however not so straightforward as to facilitate the drawing up of such ideal electoral patterns. It means that the Commission must consider all of the factors together, and exercise a judgement in which, taken all together, the pattern of electoral wards which they devise demonstrates as close a pattern as possible to the ideal described above.
- 16 This document details the Commission's approach to resolving this challenge: it sets out below the issues to be considered and gives some understanding of the broad approach which the Commission take towards each of the statutory considerations to be made when addressing a review's particular circumstances.

Timetable

- 17 As noted at 8 above, Section 29 of the Act lays upon the Commission the duty to review the electoral arrangements for each principal area at least once every ten years. In light of the Written Statement, the Commission has prepared and published an amended programme for the period and sent a copy to Welsh Ministers, as required by the Act. The timetable for the programme of reviews can be found at Appendix 1.

Procedure

Procedure

- 18 The procedure for conducting local government reviews, including electoral reviews, is set out in Chapter 4 of the Act.

Pre-review Procedure

- 19 Before conducting a review the Commission is required to take such steps as it considers appropriate to bring the review to the attention of the mandatory consultees and any other person it considers likely to be interested in the review. If any directions are given by Welsh Ministers then the Commission is also required to make the mandatory consultees and such other interested persons aware of these.

- 20 In respect of principal area electoral reviews Section 34(3) of the Act defines 'mandatory consultees' as:
- any local authority affected by the review;
 - the police and crime commissioner for any police area which may be affected by the review;
 - any organisation representing the staff employed by local authorities which has asked to be consulted; and
 - such other persons as may be specified by order made by the Welsh Ministers.
- 21 Approximately three months prior to the planned start of a review Commission officials will meet with officers of the council under review. This meeting will set out the general practices and procedures of the review. Commission officials will discuss what the expectations of the Commission are for the review, how we intend to undertake consultation and how we expect the council to support the review, in terms of providing information, making proposals and in relation to publicising the review. The Commission will also request specific data at this meeting including five year forecasts of the electorate (the information required that it will request is outlined in the technical note attached at Appendix 2).
- 22 It will be for the principal council to decide which of their officers attend this meeting. However, the Commission recommends that the council consider the following officers (or their equivalents) attending: The Chief Executive Officer (or equivalent), the Electoral Services Officer, a legal services representative and a planning officer to manage the electorate forecast requirement. The Commission consider that these officers will all have a different role to play in ensuring the review is conducted efficiently and effectively with a greater likelihood of a successful review outcome.
- 23 Following the officials' meeting, officials of the Commission and the designated Lead Commissioner will meet with the principal council Chief Executive Officer and Group Leaders. The Commission will set out its expectations for the review, the appropriate number of elected members for the council under review (see 29 below and Appendix 3) and will emphasise the importance of receiving locally generated proposals for the area and will also set out its timetable and consultation procedures.
- 24 At around the same time, the Commission will also brief the full council with similar information, emphasising the need for quality representations to help inform the Commission's decisions. The Commission will seek to speak at a scheduled council meeting so as to avoid councils having additional meetings for the purposes of the electoral review. The Lead Commissioner will attend this briefing.
- 25 The Commission wishes to encourage principal councils to use the knowledge of their respective areas to suggest a scheme for electoral arrangements to the Commission when a review is being undertaken. A council should be in a position to respond to the

review by the Commission by suggesting electoral wards that meet the requirements of communities and which do not sever local ties.

- 26 At around this time, the Commission will also meet representatives of community and town councils and will give a similar briefing. We would welcome meeting at least one representative of each community and town council in the area under review as their presence would be especially beneficial. This may be on the same day as the full council briefing. This community and town council briefing will emphasise the Commission's view on the role of communities as part of the electoral review and explain the kind of information that is helpful to the Commission when deciding what draft proposals to consult on. The Commission will ask the principal council under review to help co-ordinate these meetings.
- 27 The Commission consider that these meetings will facilitate a review which generates the greatest amount of participation from those individuals and groups that it thinks will have the most impact on the review. At the official start of the review the Commission will write to the principal council under review, all the community councils in the area, the Members of Parliament and Assembly Members for the local constituencies and other interested parties to inform them of its intention to conduct the review, to request their preliminary views. The Commission will also issue press releases about the review and seek to conduct radio interviews where it can to publicise the review to the media and will seek to facilitate interviews when required to publicise the review. The Commission will also provide publicity material that it will request both the principal council and town and community councils distribute in appropriate places, such as public libraries, town and community notice boards, websites and council newsletters etc.
- 28 The Commission has adopted a methodology to determine the number of elected members appropriate for each Council. An explanation of the methodology and the resultant numbers of councillors identified for the principal councils can be found at Appendix 3. The Commission consider the statement of the numbers of councillors determined by its methodology as an aim that the Commission will work towards and can be used to put forward locally generated schemes. The Commission may, however, consider varying from this aim if provided with cogent reasons for doing so and if the variation is able to provide effective electoral arrangements.

Draft Proposals

- 29 Following the period of consultation, the Commission consider the representations it has received and will publish draft proposals for consultation. The consultation period will last between 6 and 12 weeks, ordinarily 12 weeks. The Commission will write to the principal council under review, all the community councils in the area, the Members of Parliament and Assembly Members for the local constituencies and other interested parties to inform them of the draft proposals, to request their views. The Commission will also issue press releases about the proposals. The Commission will also provide publicity material that it will request both the principal council and town and community councils distribute in appropriate places, such as public libraries, town and community notice boards, websites and council newsletters etc.

Final Proposals

- 30 Following the period of consultation, the Commission will consider the representations it has received and publish Final Recommendations and submit them to Welsh Government. The Commission will write to the principal council under review, all the community councils in the area, the Members of Parliament and Assembly Members for the local constituencies and other interested parties to inform them of its submission of recommendations to Welsh Government. The Commission will also issue press releases about the recommendations. The Commission will also provide publicity material that it will request both the principal council and town and community councils distribute in appropriate places, such as public libraries, town and community notice boards, websites and council newsletters etc.
- 31 There is no further period of consultation with the Commission.
- 32 It is then for Welsh Government to decide how it wishes to proceed on the recommendations. Ordinarily, after a period of at least 6 weeks, an Order would be made, which may contain minor modifications.

The considerations to be made during an electoral review

- 33 Typically, reviews present a range of issues and challenges which require a judgement on balance, taking into account matters, in addition to statutory requirements, that include the following:
- effective and convenient local government;
 - electoral equality;
 - community tie arguments that justify atypical levels of electoral equality;
 - topography of the land, hills and rivers creating natural boundaries and motorways/railways forming man-made boundaries;
 - rural/urban divide;
 - community area and community ward (where community areas are warded) boundaries being used as primary building blocks; and,
 - single versus multi-member electoral wards.
- 34 The Commission will take into account all of these factors when making recommendations and invite respondents to consider each of these when submitting schemes and commenting on the draft proposals.

Effective and convenient local government

- 35 It is a duty of the Commission to recommend to Welsh Ministers electoral arrangements that are to achieve effective and convenient local government for principal councils.
- 36 In seeking to ensure effective and convenient local government, the Commission, when considering proposed electoral arrangements, ensures that electoral wards are internally coherent. That is to say, that there are reasonable road links across the electoral ward so that it can be easily traversed, and that all electors in the ward can engage in the affairs and activities of all parts of it without having to travel through an adjoining ward. This situation may arise, for example, when a potential electoral ward boundary amalgamates two communities where a feature such as a mountain or river

divides them.

- 37 Factors including the convenient access to elected members by the electors and people they represent, patterns of settlements and ease of communications within electoral areas will be taken into account.

Electoral equality and Numbers of Councillors

- 38 The number of electors within electoral wards represented by elected members indicates the electoral ratios for those wards. As mentioned at paragraph 28 above, the Commission will consider for each review the appropriate number of elected members for the council under review according to the methodology set out in Appendix 3.
- 39 Setting the number of elected members enables the average electoral ratio for the council to be calculated. Although the Commission will seek to achieve ratios close to the council average, the Commission acknowledge, however, that there will be variances. When considering what variance is acceptable, the Commission must comply with the considerations set out in the legislation that state that the Commission must seek to ensure that *“the ratio of local government electors to the number of members of the council to be elected is, as nearly as may be, the same in every electoral ward of the principal area”*.
- 40 While it could be helpful to have a percentage variance from the council average that will be acceptable in terms of electoral equality, the Commission takes the view that each council is different and that some councils and electoral wards will be able to provide for a better level of electoral equality than others. The Commission will seek to provide the best level of electoral equality for each area under review and will take each case on its merit. The Commission takes the view that departing from the average ratio for the council can only be justified by clear evidence of other balancing factors, such as local ties or other relevant considerations.
- 41 Many principal councils have both urban and rural electoral wards. In previous reviews the Commission have received comments to the effect that urban areas should have proportionately more councillors than rural areas because urban areas present the more complex issues. Others argued that rural areas should have proportionately more councillors because rural populations are more dispersed, and therefore harder to contact. There is no provision in legislation for such proportionality. Increasing use of electronic communication methods generally makes no distinction between urban and rural areas. However, there may be exceptions where local characteristics, including topography and the availability of high-speed broadband, lead to an acceptance of a particular variance in electoral ratio for one or more electoral wards.
- 42 The Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 places a further requirement on the Commission, Section 30 (2) (a) which states that account must be taken of *“...any discrepancy between the number of local government electors and the number of persons eligible to be local government electors (as indicated by relevant official statistics)...”*. The Commission is reliant on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to provide this information. The information will not always be available to the level of detail required to make proposals which are conducive to effective and convenient local government. The Commission will utilise the available statistics as best it can and where it is appropriate to do so. The Commission will consider representations which

use the discrepancy between electors and those eligible to vote in its considerations of electoral arrangements but only where the statistics have been provided by the ONS at the outset of the review.

- 43 The Commission's general intent is to improve electoral equality as a result of a review. This will be informed by the data provided by councils as to current electors as well as five year electoral forecasts and to respond to the implications of changes in the number and distribution of electors. The Commission looks to councils to provide realistic estimates of population changes supported by appropriate evidence. In the experience of the Commission the projected figures are often at significant variance with the actual change in number of electors. In general terms, all councils will project an increase in the number of electors, often in every electoral ward. The reality however, is that there is a degree of population shift away from rural communities and councils and towards more urban areas. When making five year forecasts, the Commission caution against making overly ambitious projections.

The appropriate number of councillors in an electoral ward

- 44 The Commission takes the view that in the first instance; it is desirable that each electoral ward should return a single member. The Commission may, however, recommend that wards be represented by up to three members in cases supported by evidence as to the character of the ward and in the interests of electoral parity. The Commission believes that it is desirable to not have more than three members in a ward as having four or more members is not appropriate in a first-past-the-post electoral system and that this many members would dilute accountability to an excessive amount. Furthermore, from an administrative point of view, an election is increasingly difficult for electoral administrators and returning officers to administrate where there are more than three members. Accordingly, the Commission will not recommend any new multi-member wards with more than three members.
- 45 Where a four and five member ward is present in the existing arrangements, the Commission would consider alternative arrangements providing for wards with three members or fewer. If the Commission received substantial evidence that there is local support for the existing arrangement from members and their electorate and that it can be evidenced that it is working effectively and is convenient for local government then the Commission may consider recommending maintaining the existing arrangement.
- 46 The Commission considers that multi-member electoral wards are more likely to be effective and convenient in urban areas than in rural areas. In areas of denser population, such as is found in urban areas, it is possible that many of the issues which a councillor may be called upon might be broadly similar in nature and would allow multiple councillors to deal with similar issues.
- 47 The Commission supports the principle that each electoral ward should reflect the requirements of the community or communities it covers and will endeavour to recommend this but recognises that sometimes multi-member wards are the most effective means of balancing the criteria and therefore may also recommend them in rural areas.

Communities

- 48 There can be some confusion over what is meant by the word community. It means

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different things to different people. Some may consider it to be the street in which they live, others a more broad village area, others much larger areas. All of these are entirely accurate and reflect the lives of people and the differences and similarities of places where we live, work and interact. However, in Wales there is an additional and more technical meaning to the word as the whole of Wales is divided into community areas.

- 49 Many community areas have community or town councils. Where a community area has a community or town council then these areas may be divided into wards for electoral purposes. Over two-thirds of Wales' population is covered by town and community councils. The Commission will use communities and community wards as the primary building blocks making up electoral wards. The 2013 Act makes provision for the Commission to recommend changes to community and community ward boundaries as a consequence of changes to the electoral ward boundaries. This provision allows the Commission some flexibility when creating electoral wards.
- 50 Accordingly, the Commission has flexibility as to how it uses the existing communities and community wards as building blocks to create electoral wards. The Commission recognises however that in creating electoral wards it must have regard to the desirability of fixing boundaries for electoral wards which are and will remain easily identifiable; and the desirability of not breaking local ties when fixing boundaries for electoral wards (these requirements are considered at paragraphs 47 and 49 respectively below). The Commission will ensure that proposals for consequential changes to community and community ward boundaries are normally subject to consultation and proposals for significant changes to boundaries will be included in a draft proposals report. The Commission will welcome representations relating to proposals for changes to boundaries that are supported by clear and relevant evidence in the initial consultation period. Any new changes of this type will only be considered at final proposals stage following substantial evidence submitted in representations made in respect of the draft proposals.

Easily identifiable boundaries

- 51 As considered at paragraph 46 above, in general the Commission will use the community areas and, where they exist, community wards as the primary building blocks for electoral wards. This in effect means that the boundaries of any proposed electoral wards are formed from the boundaries of existing local government areas and as such should be easily identified. This does however depend on the community area and community ward boundaries being regularly reviewed by the principal council to take account of new developments that cross existing boundaries. Where changes to community or community ward boundaries are considered as a consequence of changes proposed to electoral ward boundaries, the Commission will seek to ensure that these new boundaries are easily identifiable.
- 52 Roads can be seen to be the focus of an area if they are the location of shops or community facilities which people visit regularly and where they interact. They may themselves be the subject of issue for communities, perhaps when safety, environmental or economic considerations are a catalyst to community interaction. Alternatively, major highways, rivers or railway lines are often physical barriers marking the boundary between different communities.

Local ties

- 53 The legislation requires that the Commission must have regard to the desirability of not breaking local ties when fixing boundaries for electoral wards. This may occur when proposals are made for new arrangements that divide into two electoral wards, communities (or community wards) that are currently together in the same electoral ward. However, such is the complexity of the term “local ties” that people may consider that their area has ties to a number of other areas. It can also be the case that those sharing an interest in the physical maintenance and management of their immediate living environment may consider that their local ties are within quite confined boundaries. For example, the Commission has received comments from those who consider that their individual community ward is separate and distinct from another community ward of the same community and they adamantly oppose being placed in an electoral ward containing another community ward from the same community.
- 54 However, the Commission may also receive representations from those who may have an interest in the way their general hospital or secondary school provides services or in the continuation of a large-scale employer and thus identify themselves as also part of a community much wider in extent. This often leads to suggestion of local ties between multiple community areas (whether they have a community or town council or not) and can often bring deep opposition to dividing community areas into two (or more) electoral wards where they were previously contained within one.
- 55 Another example of local ties could be that an area identifies itself as a Welsh-speaking area. We will give recognition to the Welsh language characteristics of a community when conducting a review. The Commission will utilise the census data to attempt to ensure that it does not put forward proposals which would undermine the use of the Welsh language.
- 56 The Commission often only hear from respondents who oppose the draft proposals on the basis that it has broken local ties. The Commission also ask that respondents tell it when proposals do reflect local ties so that the Commission knows that it has got its proposals right and do not change them on the basis of other information.
- 57 In some areas an electoral ward will be greater in physical extent than an identifiable community (or community ward): sometimes the Commission have to combine two or more distinct and separate communities within an electoral ward. This is particularly so in rural areas.

Electoral ward names

- 58 Where the Commission proposes to form new electoral wards the Commission will also suggest names for the new wards. Where appropriate the Commission will propose alternative English and/or Welsh names for the new wards. In the creation of the names the Commission will consult with the Welsh Language Commissioner on the suitability of the Welsh language names proposed prior to the publication of draft or final proposals.
- 59 During consultation periods the Commission welcomes suggestions for alternative names in Welsh and/or English as appropriate. The Commission favours names linked to the area under consideration but does not favour names that merely list the names

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of every community within a proposed electoral ward.

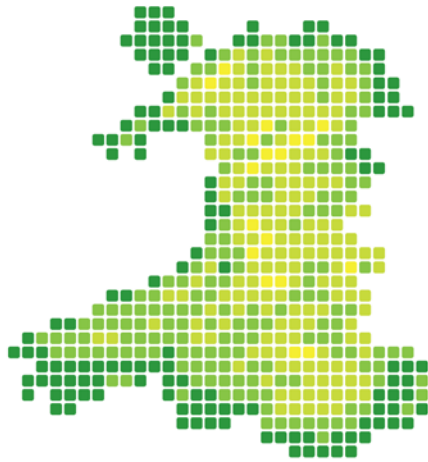
Representations

- 60 The Commission wishes to encourage principal councils to use the knowledge of their respective areas to suggest a scheme for electoral arrangements to the Commission when a review is being undertaken. Having conducted a review of its communities, and being aware of the appropriate number of members to be elected for the principal council area, that council should be in a position to respond to the review by the Commission by suggesting electoral wards that meet the requirements of communities having identifiable boundaries and which do not break local ties.
- 61 The Commission encourages town and community councils, members, interested parties and the general public to make representations and suggestions as part of the process of review. The Commission welcomes representations that are based on evidence and facts which are relevant to the electoral arrangements under consideration. The Commission will consider, acknowledge and summarise every representation made. If any person or body makes a representation to the Commission and do not receive an acknowledgment, they should contact the Commission to ensure it has received the representation. If your representation is not acknowledged then it is highly likely the Commission has not received the representation and it will not be considered in the Commission's deliberations.
- 62 A summary of every representation the Commission receives is published in an appendix in the Commission's Draft Proposals and Final Proposals Reports. The Commission has a policy that members of the public will not be named in the summaries of representations that will be published in the reports. The Commission will ascribe the locale of their residence to the representation summary.

Conclusion

- 63 An electoral review is an exercise of the discharge of statutory responsibility, the application of powers given to the Commission, and the display of judgement which the legislation calls for. The Commission's policies are intended to give others confidence in how it will approach the challenges in any review, but do not preclude its striking of the right balance in the particular circumstances of the communities and principal council under review. The Commission exercises a collective judgment in determining the issues leading to the proposals in the reviews and the considerations given to the issues and the reasoning adopted will be explained in the reports.

March 2017



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Local Democracy and
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ELECTORAL REVIEW PROGRAMME 2017

ASSESSMENT AND TIMETABLE

Introduction

1. The Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 requires the Commission to publish a ten year programme of electoral reviews.
2. In February 2013 the Commission set about analysing the information it had obtained from principal councils and the relevant factors considered necessary to develop a 10 year programme of electoral reviews for the 22 principal councils of Wales.
3. On 20 January 2014 the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery reported to the First Minister recommending changes to the make-up and operation of Wales' 22 principal councils. In order to avoid any nugatory work the Commission suspended its electoral review programme.
4. On 23 June 2016 the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government published a Written Statement asking the Commission to restart its 10 year programme with a new prioritised timetable with an expectation that all 22 electoral reviews be completed in time for the new arrangements to be put into place for the 2022 local government elections. In the Cabinet Secretary's Statement, he requested that the reviews for Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Monmouthshire, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Torfaen be the first nine reviews in the programme.
5. This revised Electoral Review Programme, utilising the latest local government electorates, sets out the Commission's new prioritised timetable and how it came to the decision.

Assessment

6. As with the previous electoral review programme, it was decided that the factors used in the consideration of a programme of reviews would be:
 - i. Divergence from the Commission's Council Size Policy aim;
 - ii. Last electoral review Order;
 - iii. Last community review Order;
 - iv. Timing of the next planned/ongoing community review;
 - v. The electoral ward variance from the county average, with specific reference to;
 - vi. those above +/-50%;
 - vii. those between +/-25% and +/-50%;
 - viii. those below +/-25%; and,
 - ix. The number of existing electoral wards with more than 3 members.
7. In order to make an assessment based on these factors the Commission contacted the principal councils to gather data on electorates and their planning on future community reviews.
8. The information collected was collated in a spreadsheet. In order to develop a formula whereby an order of priority could be determined a points based RAG (red-amber-green) system was used. The factors where RAG was used and the determining parameters were as follows:

Appendix 1

Factor	R		A		G	
	Points	Parameter	Points	Parameter	Points	Parameter
i.	3	Greater than +/-25%	2	Between +/-10% and +/-25%	1	Less than +/-10%
ii.	3	Pre 2000	2	Between 2000 and 2011	1	Post 2011
iii.	3	Pre 2007	2	Between 2007 and 2013	1	Post 2013
vi.	3	Greater than 10%	2	Between 1% and 10%	1	No wards
vii.	3	Greater than 30%	2	Between 15% and 30%	1	Less than (and equal to) 15%
viii.	3	Less than 70%	2	Between 70% and 85%	1	Greater than (and equal to) 85%
ix.	3	Greater than 10%	2	Between 1% and 10%	1	No wards

Note. Factor iv. does not appear in the above table as a planned/ongoing community review is taken into consideration in the timing of a review, not priority. Principle councils undertaking community reviews can be found in the programme at Appendix B.

9. A completed assessment table can be found at Appendix A. It should be noted that for Cardiff, Flintshire, Neath Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taf these areas have conducted community reviews and recommendations have been submitted to Welsh Government but no Order has yet been made. It has been assumed that these Orders will be made before the Commission undertakes its electoral reviews.

Electoral Review Programme 2017 (ERP 2017)

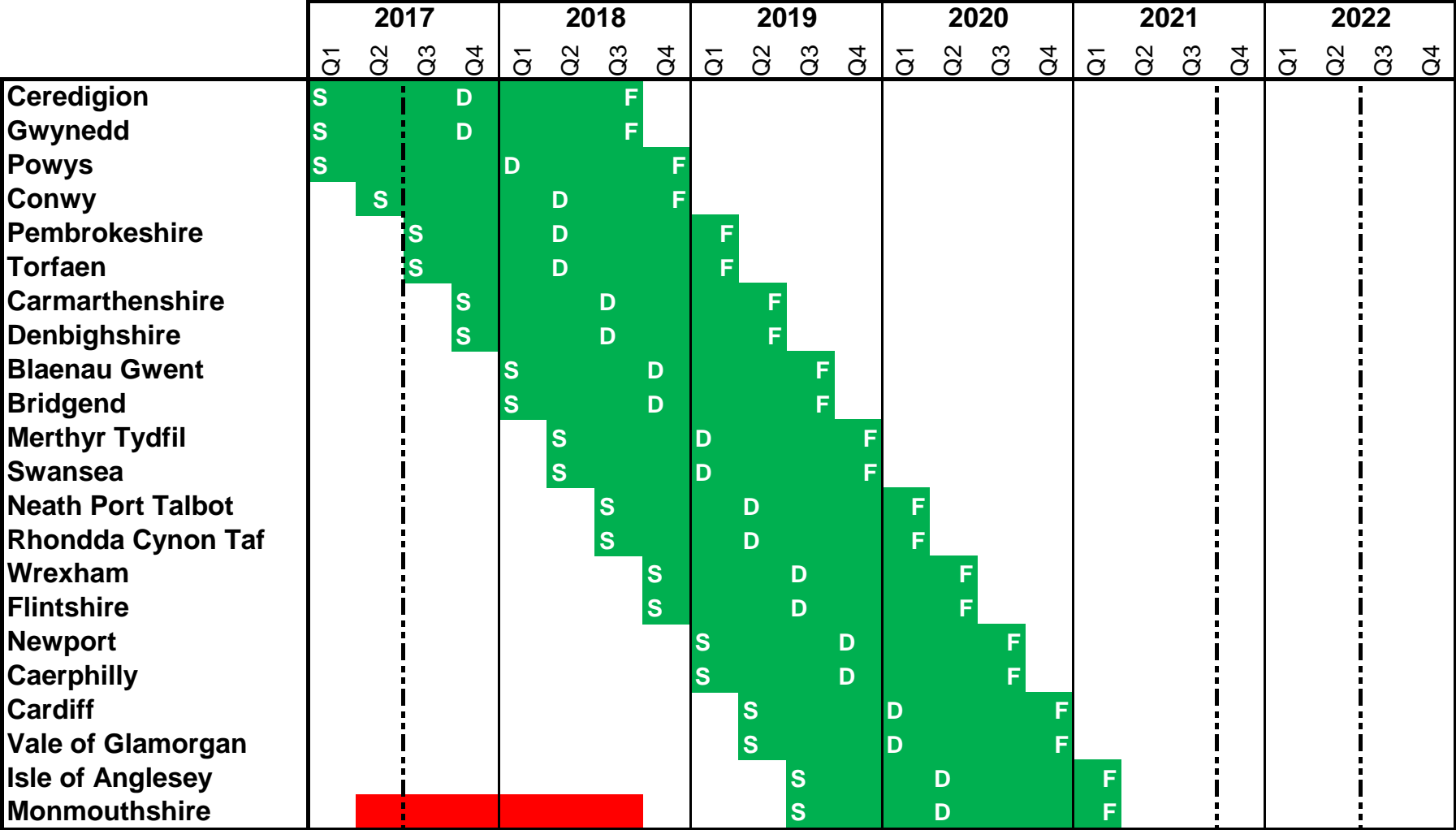
10. The ERP 2017 can be found at Appendix B.
11. The programme is based upon the base data in the assessment table but moving principal councils up or down the order to take into consideration the Cabinet Secretary's desire for Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Monmouthshire, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Torfaen to be completed first and where a community review is underway or in the planning. The programme also reflects provision we have made to provide enough time for WG to produce a community Order before an electoral review can commence.
12. The only principal council which has indicated it is to conduct or complete a full community review prior to the 2022 local government election is Monmouthshire. They have communicated their intention to complete their suspended community review following the local government election in 2017. The Monmouthshire electoral review is however one of the nine reviews the Cabinet Secretary has requested to be the first to be undertaken within the programme. The Commission is of the view that the review of electoral arrangements in Monmouthshire would be substantially enhanced by allowing the completion of the community review before work begins on the electoral review. This is in line with the views of Monmouthshire County Council and the Cabinet Secretary has agreed that for this reason the Monmouthshire electoral review be scheduled at the end of the programme.

Appendix A - Timetable Assessment




Principal Council	Members	Council Size Aim	Divergence from Council Size Aim %	Last electoral Order	Last community change	Electoral Wards	EWS variance > 50%	EWS % variance > 50%	EWS variance 25-50%	EWS % variance 25-50%	EWS variance 0-25%	EWS % variance 0-25%	No. EWS with >3 members	% EWS with >3 members	R	A	G	Formula	Overall Review Priority	Note
Isle of Anglesey	30	35	-14%	2012	2009	11	0	0%	0	0%	11	100%	0	0%	0	2	5	9	22	
Blaenau Gwent	42	30	40%	n/c	2010	16	0	0%	3	19%	13	81%	1	6%	2	4	2	16	1	
Bridgend	54	46	17%	1998	2009	39	3	8%	11	28%	25	64%	1	3%	2	5	0	16	1	
Caerphilly	73	60	22%	1998	2012	33	0	0%	2	6%	31	94%	2	6%	1	3	3	12	17	
Cardiff	75	75	0%	1998	2016*	29	2	7%	1	3%	26	90%	5	17%	2	1	4	12	17	* Awaiting Community Order
Carmarthenshire	74	75	-1%	1998	2016	58	1	2%	12	21%	45	78%	0	0%	1	3	3	12	17	Priority given by Cabinet Secretary - cancelled order
Ceredigion	42	38	11%	2002	2000	40	1	3%	16	40%	23	58%	0	0%	3	3	1	16	1	Priority given by Cabinet Secretary - cancelled order
Conwy	59	46	28%	1998	2015	38	0	0%	9	24%	29	76%	1	3%	2	3	2	14	8	Priority given by Cabinet Secretary - cancelled order
Denbighshire	47	47	0%	1998	2003	30	0	0%	4	13%	26	87%	0	0%	2	0	5	11	21	Priority given by Cabinet Secretary - cancelled order
Flintshire	70	61	15%	1998	2016*	57	1	2%	13	23%	43	75%	0	0%	1	4	2	13	13	* Awaiting Community Order
Gwynedd	75	61	23%	2002	2007	71	6	8%	26	37%	39	55%	0	0%	3	3	1	16	1	Priority given by Cabinet Secretary - cancelled order
Merthyr Tydfil	33	30	10%	n/c	n/c	11	0	0%	2	18%	9	82%	3	27%	3	2	2	15	5	
Monmouthshire	43	46	-7%	2002	2002	42	1	2%	7	17%	34	81%	0	0%	1	4	2	13	13	Priority given by Cabinet Secretary - cancelled order
Neath Port Talbot	60	56	7%	n/c	2016*	42	2	5%	13	31%	27	64%	0	0%	3	1	3	14	8	* Awaiting Community Order
Newport	50	49	2%	2002	2002	20	0	0%	4	20%	16	80%	1	5%	1	4	2	13	13	
Pembrokeshire	60	61	-2%	1998	2011	60	2	3%	17	28%	41	68%	0	0%	2	3	2	14	8	Priority given by Cabinet Secretary - cancelled order
Powys	73	67	9%	1998	2008	73	6	8%	25	34%	42	58%	0	0%	3	2	2	15	5	Priority given by Cabinet Secretary - cancelled order
Rhondda Cynon Taf	75	75	0%	1998	2016*	52	5	10%	17	33%	30	58%	0	0%	3	1	3	14	8	* Awaiting Community Order
Swansea	72	75	-4%	1998	2011	36	2	6%	6	17%	28	78%	6	17%	2	4	1	15	5	
The Vale of Glamorgan	47	51	-8%	2002	2010	23	0	0%	5	22%	18	78%	2	9%	0	5	2	12	17	
Torfaen	44	30	47%	2002	2013	24	1	4%	5	21%	18	75%	0	0%	1	4	2	13	13	Priority given by Cabinet Secretary - cancelled order
Wrexham	52	54	-4%	1998	2009	47	2	4%	10	21%	35	74%	0	0%	2	3	2	14	8	

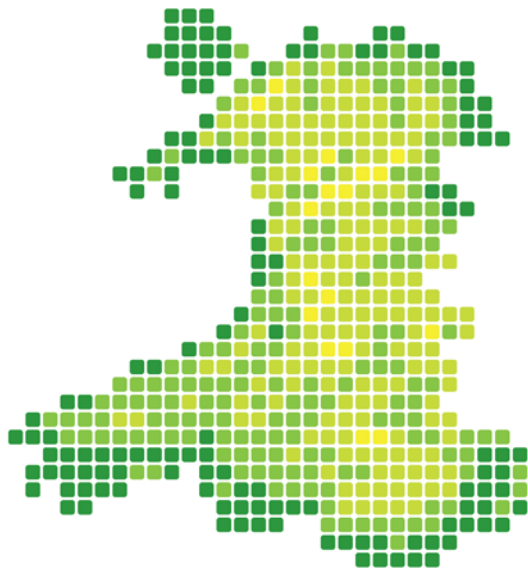
0-10%	within 5 years	within 3 years	0%	0-15%	85-100%	0%
10-25%	5-15 years	3-10 years	0-10%	15-30%	70-85%	0-10%
>25%	>15 years	>10 years	>10%	>30%	<70%	>10%

ELECTORAL REVIEW PROGRAMME 2017



S - Start of review
 D - Draft Proposals
 F - Final Proposals
 E - Local Government Election

 - Electoral Review
 - Community Review under old legislation
 - Period whereby recommendations may not be made by the Commission - August to May



Comisiwn Ffiniau a
Democratiaeth Leol
Cymru



Local Democracy and
Boundary Commission
For Wales

Electoral Reviews: Council Size Policy

October 2016

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales is required to carry out periodic reviews of the electoral arrangements of principal areas in Wales. The way the Commission conducts an electoral review is defined by legislation, our *Electoral Reviews: Policy and Practice* document and by Directions that may be issued by Welsh Ministers.
- 1.2 The Commission published its original *Electoral Reviews: policy and practice* document on 12 March 2012. That document did not include the Commission's approach to council size. Accordingly, in May 2012, we produced a consultation paper setting out a preliminary view of how council size may be determined as a precursor to an electoral review.
- 1.3 At the end of the initial consultation period we had received responses from the majority of principal councils, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), political parties and individuals, including former councillors. The general response was in favour of an approach based on the identification of the number of councillors that would be appropriate to ensure the provision of effective and convenient local government for councils. The specific methodology proposed by the paper was, however, not generally supported. It was clear that there were some concerns about the suggested banding approach. The view was expressed that the methodology used and justification for establishing council sizes should be based upon wider factors than socio-geographical characteristics alone, and may need to include population density factors. There was also the view that the ratios of elector per councillor adopted in the consultation paper need to be justified.
- 1.4 Representatives of the Commission met with representatives of the WLGA in July 2012 to discuss the outcome of the consultation. At the meeting it was agreed that the Commission would work with the Local Government Data Unit ~ Wales to consider further the methodology used for determining council size and to investigate alternative data sets and methodologies. Further meetings were held with the WLGA and the Data Unit and, following detailed analysis work by the Data Unit, the Commission were able to consider alternative methodologies that utilised data that was both current and readily available. We considered methodologies which variously took account of electorate numbers, population size and measures of population density and urbanisation. We have arrived at a preferred methodology that is broadly based on the method in place in Scotland at the time.
- 1.5 The preferred methodology was published as a consultation paper on 27 March 2013. We received responses from over half of the principal councils, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), two political parties and individuals. The general response was in favour of the methodology and that it was appropriate to ensure the provision of effective and convenient local government for councils.
- 1.6 In light of the restarted electoral review programme and policy and practice the Commission has updated the policy reflecting the latest Office for National Statistics data.

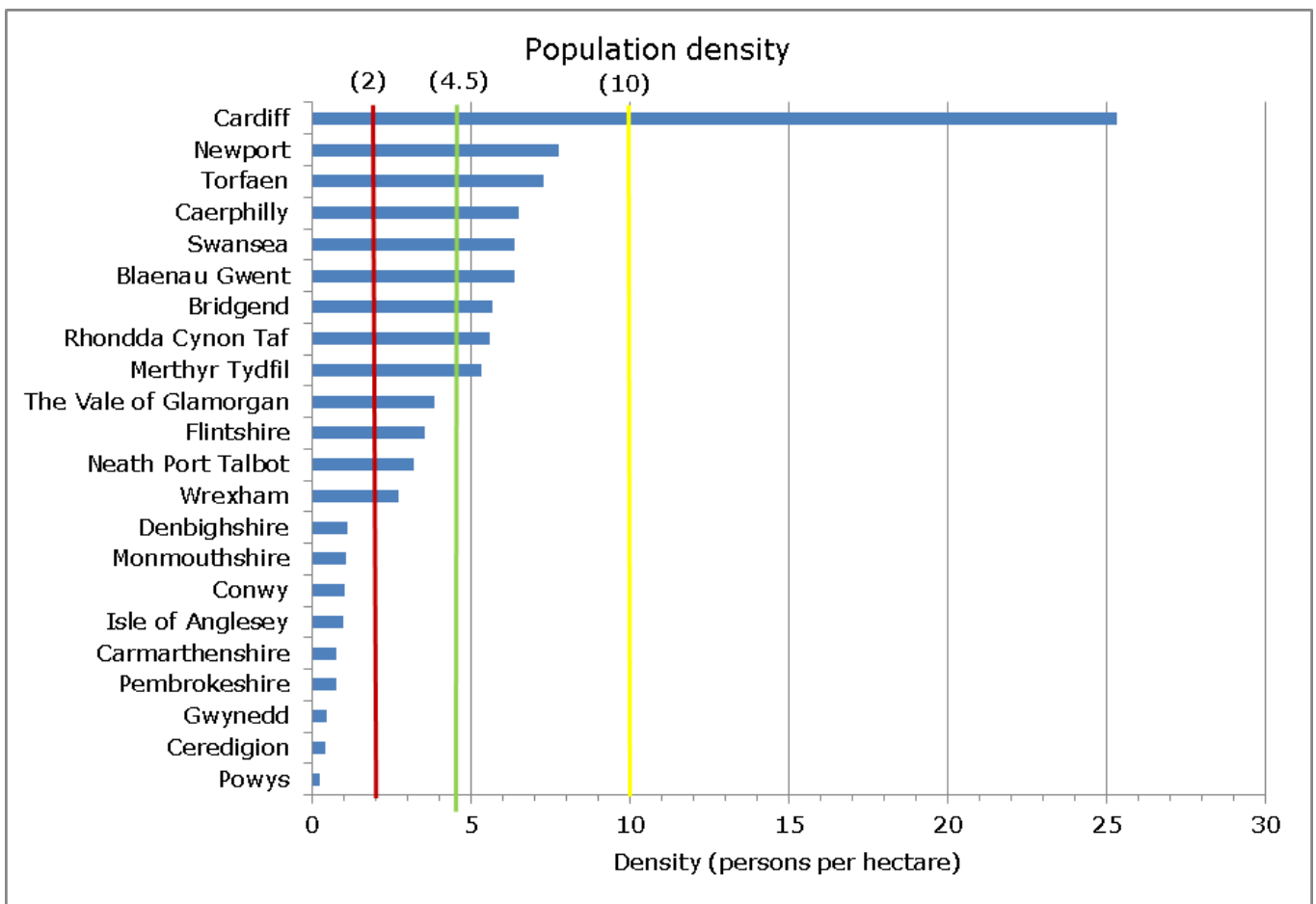
2. Council Size Methodology

- 2.1 In considering a methodology for determining the size of councils the Commission has adopted the principle that the modelling of councillor numbers should be objective, transparent and underpinned by a robust methodology. In arriving at a preferred methodology the Commission took account of the method that was in place in Scotland at their fourth general review which has been an accepted and tested approach to adjudicating council size on Local Authorities with variations of geography, topography and population distribution. The Commission and the Data Unit have worked with the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland to better understand how their approach was developed and, as a result, a comparable model for Wales has been produced.
- 2.2 The methodology in our policy uses information relating to the population distribution within councils enabling a conclusion to be drawn on the relative urban and / or rural nature of their areas, in demographic terms. Using the data to then categorise the councils enables a transparent and robust approach which will provide a sustainable method for future allocation. It ensures that councils with similar characteristics are being treated in the same way. The parameters used to determine the categories are urbanisation (percentage of the population living outside of settlements with a population of more than 10,000) and population density (number of persons per hectare). The categories have been determined by a combination of looking at appropriate groupings in the data and as determined by appropriate patterns of population distribution within principal council areas.
- 2.3 The Commission considered using other factors in the model in addition to those described above. During the consultative process the Commission has received suggestions that deprivation be a consideration in council sizing policy. It was concluded that such an element would increase complexity at the expense of transparency. A methodology based on demographic distribution is the basis of the approach we consider most appropriate for Wales.

Population Density

2.4 The first factor considered is population density. The chart below shows the distribution across Wales of the population density. The data used is the 2015 Mid Year Estimates¹ of population and the associated 2015 population densities. The data continues to suggest that there are four groups of principal councils in Wales in terms of population density (from top to bottom):

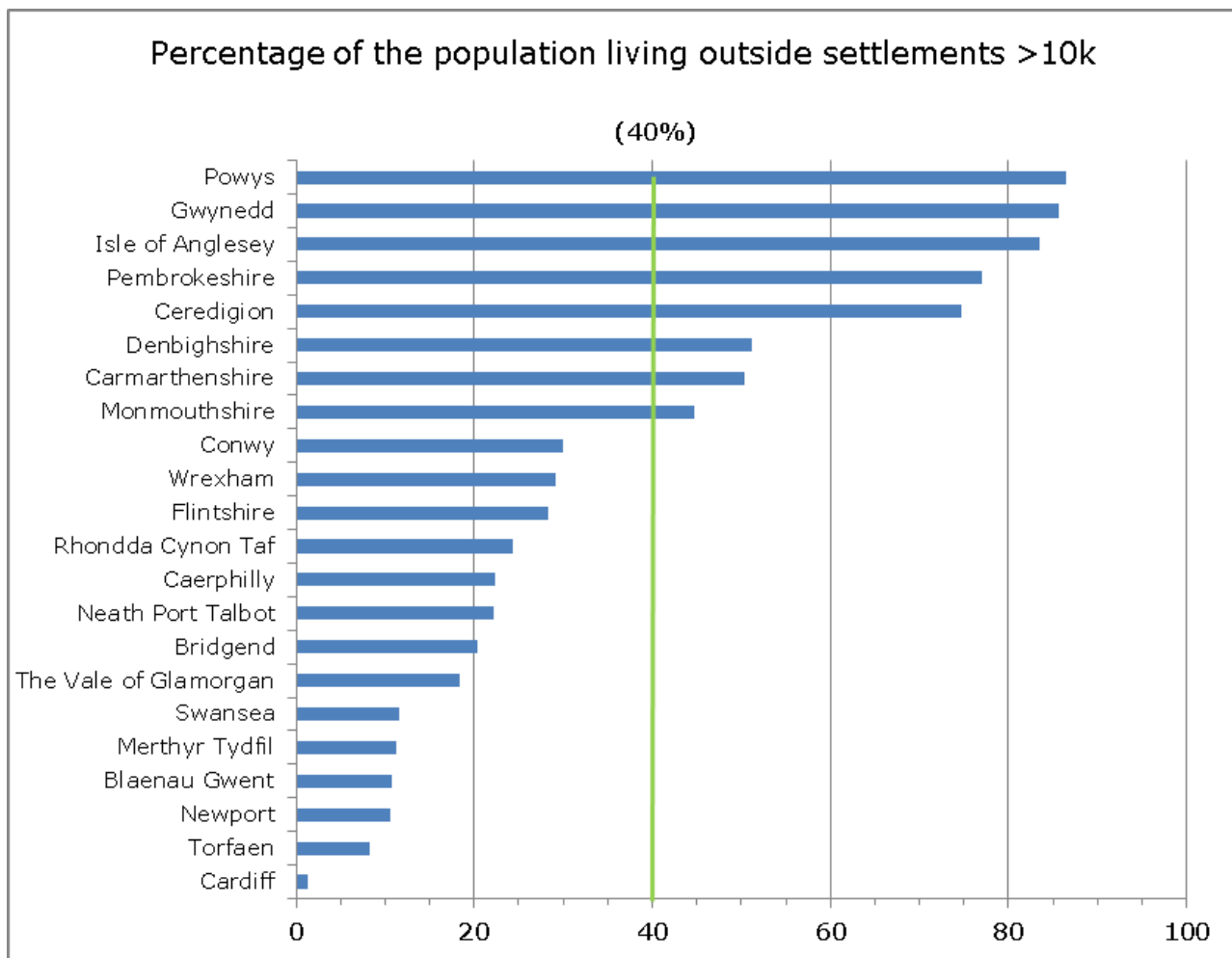
- i. Those greater than or equal to 10 (Cardiff);
- ii. Those greater than or equal to 4.5 but less than 10 (Newport to Merthyr Tydfil);
- iii. Those greater than or equal to 2 but less than 4.5 (The Vale of Glamorgan to Wrexham); and,
- iv. Those less than 2 (Denbighshire to Powys)



2.5 The Commission is therefore content to continue using the factors as set out in our Council Size Policy of 2013.

Urbanisation

- 2.6 It was considered that the Commission could divide Wales' principal councils by the four categories identified purely on the population density. However, the Commission believes that there is merit in establishing a robust model which reflects both population density and the dispersal of population within a local authority area and can continue and adapt to changes to Wales' principal councils population changes in the future. Thus, the model includes both sets of factors even though, in this first instance, it does not impact on a number of principal councils.
- 2.7 The second factor we therefore considered was 'urbanisation' or the percentage of population living outside settlements with a population over 10,000. This factor distinguishes those councils that have a preponderance of population that lives in larger communities, town or urban settlements. The chart below shows the distribution across Wales of the percentage of the population living outside of settlements with a population of more than 10,000. Although there is no clear split in the data, in order to distinguish where a council's population is concentrated more in urban areas we have identified two groups, the dividing point being where 40% of the population live outside of settlements of 10,000 people.



- 2.8 When compared to the 2011 there has been some shifts in the percentage of population living outside of 10,000 persons or more settlements. There have been three principal councils with shifts over 10%: Bridgend (12.2 percentage points decrease), Conwy (11.1 percentage points decrease) and Monmouthshire (11.3 percentage points decrease).

This represents the population moving from more rural locations to more urban locations in those council areas.

- 2.9 This has one impact where a council appears above or below the 40% threshold. Conwy has moved from 41.2% to 30%, moving to within 1% of Wrexham.
- 2.10 The Commission is content that, although there has been a move of one authority below the threshold that the differential between Conwy at 30% and Monmouthshire at 44.6% is still significant and an appropriate point to place that factor in the Commission's methodology.

Summary of Model Parameters

- 2.11 To take account of the circumstances in Wales, responses to the consultations and ensuring that only significant changes in population density would change a principal council's category a set of categories of urbanisation and population density continue to be as follows:
- Where 40% or more of the population that live outside settlements larger than 10,000 persons ; and,
 - Where the population density is greater than or equal to 10 persons per hectare, is greater than or equal to 4.5 persons per hectare but less than 10 persons per hectare, is greater than or equal to 2 persons per hectare but less than 4.5 persons per hectare, is less than 2 persons per hectare.

Categorisation and Councillor Allocation

2.12 Using the values from the charts above and described at paragraph 2.11 gives the categorisation parameters shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Categorisation parameters

Category	Urban nature (% of population living outside of towns with more than 10,000 population)		Population density (persons per hectare)
1	Less than 40%	AND	Greater than or equal to 10
2	Less than 40%	AND	Greater than or equal to 4.5
3	More than 40%	AND/OR	Less than 4.5
4	More than 40%	AND	Less than 2

2.13 Using this methodology the councils are categorised as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Category allocation

Council	Category
Blaenau Gwent	2
Bridgend	2
Caerphilly	2
Cardiff	1
Carmarthenshire	4
Ceredigion	4
Conwy	3
Denbighshire	4
Flintshire	3
Gwynedd	4
Isle of Anglesey	4
Merthyr Tydfil	2
Monmouthshire	4
Neath Port Talbot	3
Newport	2
Pembrokeshire	4
Powys	4
Rhondda Cynon Taf	2
Swansea	2
The Vale of Glamorgan	3
Torfaen	2
Wrexham	3

2.14 Once the councils are allocated to a category then a ratio of councillors to population is applied to each council within the category. This approach takes account of the size of the overall population, whilst continuing to ensure that councils with similar characteristics are treated the same.

2.15 The population ratios for the categories are determined as a set and having regard for the categories determined by urbanisation and population density. A two fold change between the top and bottom categories is proposed in Wales to reflect the slightly smaller range in urbanisation and population density. The current average ratio for category 4 councils is approximately 1:2,000 and so it was considered appropriate to apply this ratio to this category. The change in ratios between categories 4 and 3 and between categories 3 and 2 is small at 500 persons per councillor. This is to reflect the gradual change in the nature of categories. There is a greater change of 1,000 between the top two categories reflecting the difference in their nature. The proposed ratios are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Councillor to population ratios

Category	Ratio (1:)
1	4,000
2	3,000
3	2,500
4	2,000

2.16 The councillor to population ratio for each category is used to determine the number of councillors as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Categorisation and councillor allocation

Category	Council	Population	Number of Councillors
1	Cardiff	357,160	89
2	Blaenau Gwent	69,544	23
	Bridgend	142,092	47
	Caerphilly	180,164	60
	Merthyr Tydfil	59,324	20
	Newport	147,769	49
	Rhondda Cynon Taf	237,411	79
	Swansea	242,382	81
	Torfaen	91,836	31
3	Conwy	116,218	46
	Flintshire	154,074	62
	Neath Port Talbot	140,992	56
	The Vale of Glamorgan	127,592	51
	Wrexham	136,647	55
4	Carmarthenshire	185,123	93
	Ceredigion	74,642	37
	Denbighshire	94,691	47
	Gwynedd	122,864	61
	Isle of Anglesey	69,979	35
	Monmouthshire	92,476	46
	Pembrokeshire	123,464	62
	Powys	132,642	66
	Wales	3,099,086	1,196

3. Constraints

- 3.1 As noted above, when considering a methodology for determining the size of councils the Commission adopted the principle that any approach to modelling councillor numbers should be objective, transparent and underpinned by a robust methodology. It is understood, however, that any method for determining council size may be constrained by legislation and Ministerial Directions and an awareness of the impact of any proposed change to the existing size of councils.
- 3.2 In respect of council size the Ministerial Directions in respect of electoral reviews have previously stated:
- (a) It is considered that a minimum number of 30 councillors is required for the proper management of the affairs of a county or a county borough council;
 - (b) It is considered that, in order to minimise the risk of a county council or a county borough council becoming unwieldy and difficult to manage, a maximum number of 75 councillors is ordinarily required for the proper management of the affairs of a county or a county borough council.

From our consultations there appears to be a general acceptance of these maxima and minima and so we have therefore accepted these as constraints to the methodology.

- 3.3 The impact that a significant change may have on the running of a council if it applied as a result of a single electoral review has also been considered. A constraint has therefore been applied so that, for each review, the number of councillors will not vary by more than 10%. At the request of the principal council concerned the Commission may consider exceeding its 10% variance limit in moving towards the size of council determined by the model, if it can be demonstrated that the solution is more conducive to effective and convenient local government
- 3.4 In order to ensure that the process is clear and fair, the constraints on maximum or minimum councillor numbers or on levels of change have been applied at the end of the process.

4. Applied Model

4.1 The councillor allocation determined by the methodology (at Section 2 above) is then subject to the constraints (at Section 3 above). Table 5 shows the existing number of councillors and gives the allocated number of councillors before and after constraints.

Table 5: Categorisation and councillor allocation before and after constraints

Category	Council	Number of councillors		
		Existing (2013)	Before constraints	After constraints
1	Cardiff	75	89	75
2	Blaenau Gwent	42	23	38
	Bridgend	54	47	49
	Caerphilly	73	60	66
	Merthyr Tydfil	33	20	30
	Newport	50	49	49
	Rhondda Cynon Taf	75	79	75
	Swansea	72	81	75
	Torfaen	44	31	40
3	Conwy	59	46	53
	Flintshire	70	62	63
	Neath Port Talbot	64	56	58
	The Vale of Glamorgan	47	51	51
	Wrexham	52	55	55
4	Carmarthenshire	74	93	75
	Ceredigion	42	37	38
	Denbighshire	47	47	47
	Gwynedd	75	61	67
	Isle of Anglesey	30	35	33
	Monmouthshire	43	46	46
	Pembrokeshire	60	62	62
	Powys	73	66	66
	Wales	1,254	1,196	1,211

4.2 The proposed methodology gives a transparent, data driven and future proof method for calculating the appropriate number of councillors in each principal council and Wales as a whole. In some councils, the councillor numbers obtained from the proposed method show significant change from their current numbers. The constraints that are subsequently applied ensure that the transition to this system is smooth and fair.

Updates

4.3 The Commission will annually update the outputs of the model shortly after Office for National Statistics' publication of new Mid Year Estimates. It will also be updated shortly after every new electoral review Order is made by Welsh Government.

Endnote

¹ The ONS Census Mid Year Estimate data sets are a consistent series of population statistics that are provided for the 30 June each year. The Census is only conducted once every 10 years and is on a different date.

Technical Note: Requirements for each principal area for the provision of statistical data to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales.

Introduction and History

- 1 In order to conduct an electoral review of a principal area it is necessary for the Commission to have the requisite statistical information upon which it can make decisions about both the number of councillors in a Council and the number of electors in each electoral ward.
- 2 At the start of an electoral review the Commission requests from the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) the latest electoral figures for each community area and ward (where a community is warded). A 5-year projection of the number of electors is also requested on the same basis.
- 3 In respect of the existing figures, these have not always been provided in a consistent format and, on a number of occasions, this has required the Commission to go back to the ERO for clarification of the figures. The inconsistencies have taken a number of forms such as electorate broken down by polling district rather than community/community ward, missing data, incorrect totals, etc. The clarification and correction of this data has taken time and effort to resolve and, on occasions, this has had an impact on the timely running of a review.
- 4 In respect of the projected figures, the Commission has received a number of different ways of calculation, ranging from blanket increases by percentile, to carefully thought-out determination of attainments, deaths and development proposals. On rare occasions we have been told that it is not possible to provide such statistics. In such circumstances the Commission has to just use the existing electorates when proposing electoral arrangements and is then unable to gauge the future suitability of the arrangements. Again, the difficulties in obtaining these statistics have, on occasion, had an impact on the timely running of a review.
- 5 The Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 places a further requirement on the Commission related to statistical data provided by a principal area: Section 30 (2) (a) states that account must be taken of “...any discrepancy between the number of local government electors and the number of persons eligible to be local government electors...”
- 6 In order to avoid the problems that have previously occurred in respect of electoral statistics, the Commission has created this Technical Note. This will assist the ERO’s of each principal council to understand the precise requirements of the Commission with regard to the electoral data it will be requesting before the start of a review.

Requirements

- 7 The Commission requires three different sets of data from the ERO of each principal council:
 - i. The existing arrangements;

- ii. A 5 year projection; and,
- iii. Each of the last 5 years data.

Existing Arrangements

- 8 The Commission requires the most up-to-date number of registered local government electors in each **community and community ward** (where a community is warded) in the principal area. These are the primary building blocks to which the Commission would prefer to use when creating electoral wards. Numbers of electors by postcode, polling district or electoral ward are **not** acceptable. The information should be provided in the pro forma provided to the council at the beginning of the review. Different councils will have different officers responsible for compiling these figures and the Council itself should identify who in the council is best placed to provide this information.
- 9 The Commission also ask that the full register of electors data, from which the information is derived, is saved at the principal council. Furthermore a redacted version of this full register is provided to the Commission.
- 10 Where there are alternative Welsh and English names these should both be given.

A Five-Year Projection

- 11 The Commission requires a carefully considered and, so far as is possible, accurate, projection of the number of electors in each existing **community and community ward** (where a community is warded) in the principal area that are forecast in the year that is five years after the year of the existing electoral figures (e.g. for 2022 where the existing electorate is for 2017). These projected figures should also be submitted in the pro forma provided to the council at the beginning of the review.
- 12 It is up to the council under review to determine how to project these forecasts. The Commission recognises that it is not an exact science and that there is currently uncertainty in the housing market due to the economic downturn which may make some developments less likely to be settled with registered electors than would previously have been the case. The Commission therefore cautions against overly optimistic forecasts and advises councils to take this into consideration when making forecasts.
- 13 Projected figures should be calculated using determination of attainers, deaths, development proposals and trends of population shift. It is unacceptable to merely provide projected population figures or blanket increases across the principal council. Where it is difficult to calculate a forecast figure at the community ward level, the Council should seek to make the best forecast possible, making pro rata forecasts, only where absolutely necessary.
- 14 In addition to the data the Commission expects each council to set out clearly how the projected figures have been calculated.
- 15 These new conditions have been set due to the historical inaccuracy of the projected figures provided in past reviews, both in terms of eventual numbers of electors in each area and the manner in which they have been created. It is clear when looking back at projections provided by Councils in the past and then comparing them with the

relevant figures at the time of attainment that there is a significant differential between the two.

- 16 Whilst the Commission recognises that it is not straightforward to provide a completely accurate projection in every case a significant effort should be made by the Councils to attain the best possible evidence based projection.

The Discrepancy between the number of electors and those eligible to be local government electors

- 17 Further to the information requested at paragraph 8 above, the Commission will request from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) the number of electors eligible to vote within a principal council area.
- 18 The Commission recognises that this data may not exist or may not be easily deliverable. However, it is for the ONS to determine whether the information is available to the data level required by the Commission to conduct its review. If it is not available the ONS must make this clear to the Commission and to interested parties who may seek to make representations to the Commission on this requirement in the Act.

October 2016

The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE LOCAL ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

DATE Thursday 23rd JUNE 2016

BY MARK DRAKEFORD, CABINET SECRETARY FOR FINANCE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Local Authority Elections (Wales) Order 2014 provided for local elections in Wales to be delayed for a year, from May 2016 to May 2017. This allowed the elections to be separated from the Assembly elections.

At the present time, the Local Government Act 1972 provides that ordinary elections to local government in Wales take place on the first Thursday of May every four years. Therefore, the next local government elections would normally take place in May 2021. Since the implementation of the provisions of the Wales Act 2014, elections to the National Assembly take place on a five-yearly cycle. The policy of the Welsh Government is that elections at local level should also be placed on a five year cycle. It is intended that councillors elected next May will therefore hold office until May 2022.

The Wales Bill, currently before Parliament, includes provisions which would enable the Assembly to legislate to determine the term of office for local government. As the Bill is currently in draft form and should these provisions, for any reason, not come into force, the Welsh Government could use the same powers under the Local Government Act 2000 as we did in 2014 to delay the elections by a year. This statement therefore provides clarity to local government as to the length of office of those to be elected next year.

In the light of this, I have considered the decision made last year in relation to the electoral arrangements of some principal councils. It was determined that reviews conducted by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales in relation to nine principal areas would not be implemented, given the intention that councils elected in 2017 would only serve a short term prior to mergers.

However, even though the elections in May next year will now result in a full term, due to their proximity, the arrangements which would be required and the disruption for potential candidates, I do not intend to implement any changes to current electoral arrangements in advance of the 2017 elections resultant from those reviews. The councils concerned are Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Monmouthshire, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Torfaen.

The decision that councils will be elected for a full term also means that the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission (the Commission) will return to its normal ten-year cycle of reviews of electoral arrangements. I expect the Commission to publish a new, prioritised programme as soon as possible which takes into account the age of the current arrangements in some areas and the amount of change since the last review was undertaken. I will ask the Commission, in planning their work, to start by revisiting the nine outstanding reviews, with a view to presenting fresh reports on these at the very start of their programme.

It is my intention that reviews of electoral arrangements in principal councils will be conducted against a set of common criteria to be agreed through the Commission. I also expect electoral reviews to have been completed for all 22 authorities within the next local government term.

These arrangements provide clarity for those considering standing for election in 2017 and also set out a long term planning horizon for local authorities and their public service partners. However, I want to be clear that discussions on the reform agenda are on-going with local authorities and other stakeholders. I will be proposing a way forward on local government reform in the Autumn.

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