

**COUNCIL MEETING – 28<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2015**

**AGENDA ITEM 10 – WELSH GOVERNMENT – CONSULTATION – DRAFT  
DIRECTIONS TO THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION  
FOR WALES**

**COMMENTS OF MEMBERS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
AT THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 21<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER, 2015**

**County Borough Councillors in Attendance:**

L.M.Adams – Chair

|                  |                   |             |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| (Mrs.)J.Bonetto  | P.Jarman          | S.Rees-Owen |
| W.J.David        | (Mrs.)S.Jones     | G.Smith     |
| (Mrs.)M.E.Davies | R.Lewis           | P.Wasley    |
| S.Evans          | B.Morgan          | R.Yeo       |
|                  | (Mrs.)S.Pickering |             |

**Non-Committee Members in Attendance:**

County Borough Councillors G.Stacey and C.J.Willis

**Directions – Local Government (Wales) Act, 2015**

General Comments:-

(2) Interpretation

- To determine ward sizes taking account of poverty issues – Members felt that this was not appropriate.
- Members were of the view that the characteristics were too limited – age, gender and ethnic mix should also be included.

(5) General Directions

- Following an election Members may find that the “population” they have to represent is far larger than the perceived “electorate”.
- It was also hoped that the Boundary Commission would have more flexibility as previously they could not work outside of the “Directions”.

**Yes/No Tick Boxes**

Members did not wish to tick the yes or no boxes as they felt they were misleading but wished to give their comments, where felt appropriate, to each of the questions as shown below:-

**Question 1 – Do you think the suggested ratio provides for effective and convenient local government?**

- Some existing wards may already have the appropriate 1:4000 ratio, but the direction appears to preclude them from continuing in their current form.
- Using a ratio could make it very difficult to take into account the individual character and culture of wards because of local features, topography etc.
- Is it possible it could produce anomalies whereby wards with a bigger population will end up with a reduced population as a collateral consequence of what's happening in neighbouring wards.
- In order to reach the proposed ratio, urban and rural wards may find that their geographical areas to be very different i.e. rural wards will cover a much greater geographical area than urban ones.
- How does this reconcile with the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales determination that Members are compensated for three days work a week when the reality of "walking your ward" is likely to be very different in terms of demands on time, travel and characteristics of population e.g. student areas.
- Members are available 24/7 and many receive calls during the early hours of the morning when residents experience problems with flooding etc. and even take calls on Christmas day and other Bank Holiday periods.
- The demands on AMs/MPs time etc are not so great as for the local Councillor.
- What about areas that have Community Councillors – no mention in the consultation document as to the ratio for Community Councillors and could/will result in Community Council areas not continuing in their current form.
- Diversity – for those individuals that work and/or have other commitments would find it very difficult to stand for election and this could have a big impact at the next elections whereby whilst there will be much fewer Councillors there could also be a great reduction in candidates.
- Members were also of the view that this was a "number crunching" exercise and no thought given to the comments raised above and throughout this response.
- Taking away yet more devolution from Local Government to Welsh Government.
- Many residents do not know who their AM or MP is but they know who the local Member is and very often AMs/MPs divert calls/cases to the local Member to act upon.
- Local Members contact details are also published on the Council's website thereby allowing residents to contact their member direct and not having to go via a Support Officer.

**Question 2 – Do you think there is a minimum number of Councillors required to ensure the effective and democratic working of a local authority?**

- The Directions do not specify a maximum or minimum number of elected members but they specify that the number of Councillors for a local authority should be no smaller than the number produced by a Councillor to elector ratio of one Councillor to every 4,000 electors.

- Should this not be left to the Boundary Commission to determine and for the Council to then be consulted upon.

**Question 3 – Do you think a minimum number of elected members per local authority should be specified in the Draft Directions?**

- Yes.
- Without a quoted minimum number, it's possible that the use of a ratio could produce anomalies on the ground. Rhondda Cynon Taf currently has 75 Members, under a much larger new merged authority incorporating Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil – this total number would only rise by 6 Members thereby creating the possibility for many wards not to reflect the geographical and cultural boundaries which currently define them.
- Members considered that the number of Councillors is likely to affect the ability of any particular Council to discharge the heavy burden of functions and duties that now fall upon elected Members.

**Question 4 – Do you think that there should be a cap on the maximum number of elected members per local authority?**

- Please refer to the response as outlined in Q3 above.

**Question 5 – Do you agree that each ward within a local authority area should have roughly the same number of electors per elected member?**

- Possibly, but this ignores other crucial factors such as – density, population, topography, culture and poor health.

**Question 6 – What effect should the particular characteristics of an area have on the number of councillors needed to represent the population?**

- Members were of the view that their ability to be familiar with local characteristics is extremely important.
- New developments will influence ratios and thereby have the potential for artificially skewing local boundaries.
- Larger areas could make community engagement far more difficult.

**Question 7 – Do you agree that commonly used Welsh language names for wards do not need an English language equivalent?**

- Members agreed that the status quo should prevail.
- Members also raised concerns on cost issues (signage) and how new developments may be affected.

**Other Comments**

Members did not agree with the aim of the Directions and also felt that the questions were misleading.

