



URGENT BUSINESS AGENDA ITEM 9

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

27TH JUNE, 2018

**REVIEW OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS BY
THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES**

**Author: JOINT REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND THE DIRECTOR OF CABINET AND
PUBLIC RELATONS**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Members' comments and approval upon a suggested methodology for ensuring that the views of this Council's Members and other stakeholders regarding proposals for prospective revised electoral arrangements for this Authority are comprehensively recorded and communicated to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales ("the Commission") within the applicable timetable and in accordance with the expressed wishes of Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the appropriate dialogue and consultation regarding electoral arrangements be undertaken in accordance with mechanisms and the timetable set out in this report.
- 2.2 In accordance with I Minute No.139 of the Council Meeting held on the 25th April, 2018 that commentary upon a review of electoral arrangements include a Working Group comprising all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an invitation being extended to all Members.

3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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:-
- 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.
- 3.4 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 Rhondda Cynon Taf should remain at 75.
- 3.5 The principles of this review:
- Electoral parity - the overriding principle;
 - The number of Councillors to remain at 75;
 - To keep within 10% of this figure as far as is possible;
 - To discourage multi member Wards and where they are necessary to a maximum of 3
 - 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 Members for proposed revised electoral arrangements.

4. ISSUES AND APPROACH

- 4.1 Members will note from Council Minute No.139 that, at its meeting on 24th April 2018, Council resolved to direct the Electoral Registration Officer (“ERO”) to produce a report as to how County Borough wards could be realigned to provide a more equitable Councillor to elector/resident balance via a Working Group of the responsible Scrutiny Committee. This would, in turn, form the basis of this Council’s representations to the Commission upon any emerging new arrangements.
- 4.2 On 19th June 2018 the Commission met with Senior Officers and Political Group Leaders to set out their programmed review of electoral arrangements for this Authority pursuant to the provisions of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 (“the Act”) which contains prescribed duties upon the Commission which seek to ensure effective and convenient Local Government. Section 21 imposes a duty upon the Commission to review electoral arrangements for each principal area at least once every ten years.
- 4.3 Whilst the Commission will be addressing the Council at its meeting scheduled for 25th July 2018, they have agreed that it would be appropriate (given the timetabling requirements set out below) for Members to have the matter referred to them at this Council meeting to make best use of the time available to facilitate consultation. The Commission confirmed at the above mentioned meeting that they are most concerned to receive representations and suggestions to, where possible, inform the final published proposals.
- 4.4 Attached at Appendix 2 is the Commission’s document “Electoral Review: Policy and Practice 2016” for Members information as to the parameters of the electoral review. Attached at Appendix 3 is a colour coded map showing the existing variance in electoral representation.
- 4.5 Members will note from the timetable set out below that an early consideration by Members of the issues considered at the meeting on 19th June 2018 is likely to add value to the consultation process and the contribution to the debate on future electoral arrangements.

5. TIMETABLE AND PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

Should Members wish to take advantage of the opportunity afforded to the Council as part of the initial consultation stage, a solution to the issues identified could be developed in the following way:

- 27th June 2018 - Background report to Members at Council

- Set out approach to be taken and agree engagement mechanism for Members (i.e. all Member Overview and Scrutiny Committee).

- **Early July – Overview and Scrutiny Committee meet to consider:**

At this meeting, Members will be asked to consider the key terms of reference for this approach. These could include, acknowledgement that the use Community boundaries as building blocks, will need to be adopted in any proposals the Council may develop. Members could agree that any future proposal developed by the Council should seek to keep change to a minimum. It will be important to acknowledge at this point that the electoral divisions highlighted by the Commission will need to be amended in some format within the parameters outlined in the guidance

To develop specific proposals, members could then instruct Officers to develop options based on these principles for future consideration and to develop appropriate feedback mechanisms. This way forward would also need to factor into any consideration appropriate engagement with stakeholders and residents.

- **July 25th – Presentation to Full Council by the Boundary Commission for Wales**
 - In addition an update report on progress be presented to Council.
- **During Summer**
 - Options and proposals developed.
- **Early September – Overview and Scrutiny**
 - Meet to discuss draft proposals from Officers.
 - Agree feedback process with the public, stakeholders and community councils.
- **September Council**
 - Council consider a preferred option and feedback sessions commence.
 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee to confirm preferred option.
- **October Council**

- Council receive feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committee and recommend preferred option to Commission.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The provisions of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 A full equality and diversity assessment is not required at this time. This position will be re-evaluated on an ongoing basis as realted actions are delivered.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

9 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Council has an opportunity to inform the debate concerning electoral arrangements by presenting cogent argument to the Commission who are anxious that local views should, where possible, help shape their final recommendations to Welsh Government.

