

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 19 November 2019
Report Subject	Flintshire Electoral Review
Report Author	Chief Executive & Chief Officer (Governance)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September, the Local Democracy & Boundary Commission for Wales (LDBC) published its draft proposals for Flintshire. The LDBC proposed changes to the arrangement of local electoral wards to make a step towards achieving electoral parity across the County.

The initial consultation process had taken place between November 2018 and January 2019. The LDBC had indicated at that time that Flintshire should have a Councillor/electorate ratio of 1:1,895: we currently have electorates of between 1,041 and 4,582. During the consultation period, we held extensive discussions with Members, including two workshops, a series of drop-in sessions and both individual and group discussions, before drafting a response.

County Council approved a response at our meeting on 29th January 2019. Members had worked together to make proposals to the LDBC for changes which would improve local representation. It was noted that Members representing rural areas had raised concerns that the size and topography of a ward was not taken into account by LDBC in balancing the ratio requirement with the logistics of effective local representation.

As reported to Council in September, the LDBC has now proposed a council of 65 members. This would be a reduction from the current council size of 70 members and would achieve an average ratio of 1,836 electors to each member.

Building on the approach adopted at the first stage, we have had ward workshops, individual discussions, a drop in session and a workshop to ensure that Members' views were heard and could be reflected, wherever possible, in the Council's response to the LDBC.

Appendix 1 of this report outlines the proposals to be submitted to the LDBC based on the extensive consultation undertaken with Members of the Council. This offers a challenge to the LDBC: Flintshire Members have a unique

understanding of the areas which they represent and unparalleled knowledge of local needs and community ties which provide community cohesion and effective representation. Some of the proposals may not meet LDBC electoral parity requirements but they do present viable options which would have local support.

Our approach last time was to allocate proposals a red/amber/green (RAG) status. We have carried that through to the current exercise. **Greens (G)** are supported LDBC proposals or alternative proposals which have consensus amongst our local Members; **Amber (A)** show local proposals which do not have consensus support and **Red (R)** indicates that no agreement has been possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Council agrees to submit the proposals set out in Appendix 1 with or without variation.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE FLINTSHIRE ELECTORAL REVIEW
1.01	The Local Democracy & Boundary Commission for Wales (LDBC) published its <i>Review of the Electoral Arrangements of the County of Flintshire - Draft Proposals Report</i> in September. The consultation period, during which the Council and other interested parties may respond to the proposals ends on 27 th November 2019.
1.02	Members will recall that the initial consultation process took place between November 2018 and January 2019. The Commission had indicated at that time that Flintshire should have a Councillor/electorate ratio of 1:1,895. We currently have electorates of between 1,041 and 4,582, with a county average of 1,705. This represents a variance of between -39% and +63%.
1.03	<p>We responded to the task by holding series of drop-in sessions and both individual and group discussions, before drafting a response. The County Council approved a response at our meeting on 29th January.</p> <p>In our response, each electoral ward has been given a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) status.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Green – Proposals where there was agreement and it was within a variance of 25% of the proposed County average. <input type="checkbox"/> Amber – Proposals where there was some disagreement but was a ‘favoured’ option and within a variance of 25% of the proposed County average. <input type="checkbox"/> Red - Proposals where there was no agreement or the proposal was not compliant as it was not within a variation of 25% of the County average. <p>Detailed maps and associated electoral information were submitted to the LDBC where any new boundaries were suggested and where any</p>

	consequential changes would also be required to Town / Community wards. All of the information previously collated, which included Members' representations, was also submitted to the LDBC for them to consider in developing their draft proposals.
1.04	<p>In September 2019, the LDBC published its draft proposals for Flintshire. These changes to the arrangement of our electoral wards are to achieve what the LDBC believes will be "a significant improvement" in the level of electoral parity across Flintshire. These will mean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a Council of 65 members – a proposed county average ratio of 1,836 electors per member. • a reduction to 39 electoral wards instead of the current 57.
1.05	<p>The Commission has proposed 17 single member wards, 18 two member wards and 4 three member wards. Originally it proposed that there be no changes to 14 electoral wards. Mold Broncoed was included as an unchanged ward, but it transpired that LDBC had misinterpreted the Council's proposals for Mold. They amended their proposals which produced a solution which the local Members and the Town Council were able to support.</p> <p>The 'unchanged' wards are identified below:</p> <p>Broughton North East Broughton South Caerwys Cilcain Connah's Quay Wepre Ewloe Flint Coleshill Greenfield Mostyn Penyffordd Sealand Shotton West Whitford</p>
1.06	<p>Whilst the reduction in the number of members is not the primary purpose of the review, the LDBC has proposed a reduction from 70 to 65 Members which is to be achieved by :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The disaggregation of Llanfynydd between the neighbouring Caergwrle, Leeswood and Treuddyn wards. • The amalgamation of the current Aston and Hawarden wards (three Members) - into a new two member ward called 'Aston and Hawarden. • The reorganisation of the four Buckley wards - which are currently represented by seven Members - into two new wards 'Buckley Bistre' and 'Buckley Mountain and Pentrobin', both of which would have three Members. • The amalgamation of the current Ffynnongroyw, Gronant and

	<p>Trelawnyd & Gwaenysgor wards - which between them have three Members - into a new ward called 'Llanasa & Trelawnyd' which would have two Members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amalgamation of the Mancot and Queensferry wards - which currently have two and one representatives respectively - into one 'Mancot & Queensferry' ward with two Members.
1.07	<p>Representatives of the LDBC provided a briefing to Group Leaders and deputies and statutory officers in September. They stressed that their proposals were not binding, and could be changed if effective representations were made to them. They also explained that in the first round, there was insufficient evidence of community support for the proposals which the County Council had put forward. We have emphasised to Members throughout the ward workshops and individual meetings that any counter proposals put forward during this stage of the consultation must have evidence of community support.</p>
1.08	<p>In the workshops, we reminded the Members present that any proposals must be within the LDBC guidelines, with the emphasis on electoral parity, which LDBC regard as having greater weight than the preservation or creation of single member wards.</p>
1.09	<p>The LDBC have provided a definition of electoral parity, which for 65 members would be a ward with 1,836 electors per councillor. A 25% variance (an upper tolerance) would be between 2,295 electors per councillor and (a lower tolerance) 1,377 electors per councillor. Those are the maximum limits to which the LDBC ordinarily operates. Ideally the ratio of electors to member would be between 2,020 electors per councillor and 1,652 electors per councillor, which is a 10% variance.</p> <p>The variance in the LDBC proposals is -20% to +24%, which represents, in their terms, an improvement on the current position.</p> <p>These numbers will change if the Council or LDBC final proposals varies the total number of members from 65.</p>
1.10	<p>Building on the approach adopted at the first stage, in October we held ward workshops, individual discussions, a drop in session and a workshop to ensure that Members' views were heard and could be reflected, wherever possible, in the Council's response to the LDBC. We have again used a RAG status to offer a consistent approach. During discussions, we identified the key considerations and reiterated that strong evidence is required to address any aspects of the proposals which we seek to oppose. We also explained that issues such as rurality, topography (unless strong evidence is provided), transient populations, local issues/workloads and political implications would not be acceptable.</p> <p>We emphasised that compelling representations needed to take into account statutory requirements and commission policies, suggesting an alternative proposal or objection to the draft proposals needs strong evidence and consider the consequences of the alternative across the widest possible area.</p> <p>Throughout this exercise, we have borne in mind the following two points:</p>

	<p>‘The Commission has placed emphasis on achieving improvements in electoral parity whilst maintaining community ties wherever possible’ (Chapter 3, paragraph 10, <i>Review of the Electoral Arrangements of the County of Flintshire Draft Proposals Report</i>)</p> <p>and that ‘The Commission recognises that there may be different combinations of communities and community wards that better reflect community ties and it would welcome any alternative suggestions that comply with the legislation’ (Chapter 13 paragraph 12 <i>Review of the Electoral Arrangements of the County of Flintshire Draft Proposals Report</i>)</p>
1.11	<p>For the majority of unchanged wards and a number of others, we received no comments and therefore these are shown as being supported in the appendix. We have produced an analysis of the LDBC proposals, showing where our current wards were being incorporated into the proposals and providing comments where appropriate. Where the LDBC had misinterpreted some of our earlier evidence, we have rectified this. For consistency, we have carried the RAG approach through to the current consultation stage. Greens are either supported LDBC proposals or alternative proposals which have consensus amongst our local Members; Amber is for local proposals which do not have consensus support and Red indicates that no agreement has been possible.</p>
1.12	<p>The Commission have proposed that three wards (in Buckley, Flint and Holywell) should have three members. The Commission have previously indicated in their presentation to Council on 23rd October 2018 that ‘in the first instance it is desirable if a single member represents each electoral ward’ .</p> <p>The LDBC indicated in the <i>Draft Proposals Report</i> page 6, paragraph 11 that :</p> <p>‘The Commission acknowledges the established practice of multi-member wards within the County of Flintshire and this is reflected in the Commission’s proposals.’</p> <p>Clearly this statement is at odds with the LDBC’s initial presentation. The Council believes that the Commission should only propose multi member wards where this is the only way to achieve electoral parity. Whilst the LDBC appears to have proposed 3 member wards as a means of achieving greater electoral parity, the Council has put forward alternative proposals that we believe could achieve similar levels of parity in some areas.</p> <p>In Flintshire, we currently have 13 x two member wards. Some have argued that this established practice is not a ‘multi-member’ approach - as that implies three or more. We are aware that 3, 4 or even 5 member wards are used in other councils, and would not seek to decry that. If a local practice has worked well it should be allowed to continue. This review, however, should not be used as an opportunity to impose an undesirable and alien approach to community representation where it has not previously existed, as in Flintshire.</p> <p>As a Council, we oppose the creation of three member wards within Flintshire because of the following, which we believe to be compelling arguments arising from our consultation with Members:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three Member wards do not feature in our representational history and ways of working: the Flintshire pattern since 1995 has been predominantly for single Member wards with some use of two member wards within our more populous urban areas. This is understood by the electorate and the current proposals would be a divergence from established local practice and what may be regarded as the 'Flintshire average'. • Members have expressed concern that three member wards could be divisive, as electors may approach all three simultaneously with the same issues, thus increasing member workload and officer workload in responding to them. Whilst that may be so, the important consideration is how the electorate perceives the change to representation. The LDBC have placed their primary emphasis on having 1 member representing 1,836 people. That can only be achieved with certainty in a single Member ward. Taking the proposals for combining the current three Holywell wards into a three member ward will mean that each individual Member is faced with the prospect of representing not the LDBC figure of 1,836 electors but 4,634, thus increasing the realistic ratio and thus work load on each councillor by almost two thirds. The same would happen, to a lesser degree in the Buckley Bistre wards, but would also apply in the proposed Buckley Pentrobin and Mountain ward, or in Flint Oakenholt and Trelawny. • Three member wards could discourage diversity as the prospect of canvassing a ward of over 4,000 would be rather more daunting for an individual than a ward with an electorate of under 2,000 people. We in Flintshire are keen supporters of the Welsh Government's proposals for increasing diversity in candidates at elections. It could be argued that the current proposals for three member wards militate against fostering diversity. • It could also be argued that the creation of three member wards would benefit established political parties at the expense of individual or Independent candidates who may lack the support or resource to be able to canvass a much larger ward. This is unlikely to be the LDBC's intention, but could be a collateral effect of the three member proposals. • It has been noted that three member wards often feature more commonly in urban councils, but also those council where elections are annually by thirds. This means that in three successive years, there is an election for one of the three ward representatives. Whilst the election process goes on, there is still continuity of knowledge and experience being offered to the electorate by the members who are not up for election in that particular year. Our elections are of the whole council and so we would not have that inherent stability of representation.
1.13	<p>The Council's response to the consultation is at Appendix 1. In the first column, we have identified our current wards, the number of Members for that ward and the ratio of Members to electors expressed, for example</p>

	using Argoed, as 1:2179. In the second column, we have the proposed ward, the proposed number of Members and then both the ratio and the percentage variance from the county average. Where the proposed figure is higher than the average, there is a +, plus sign in front of the figure, where lower, there is a -, minus sign. Column three is for notes, such as 'unchanged ward', or rectifying an error. The fourth column is for comments and is colour coded. Green is for supported LDBC proposals or alternative proposals which have consensus amongst our local Members; Amber is for local proposals which do not have consensus support and Red indicates that no agreement has been possible.
1.14	This is the conclusion of Stage Two of the review process. At Stage Three, the Commission will prepare a Final Proposals Report which will be submitted to Welsh Government (in 2020 along with those for all other councils in Wales). Following that, the Welsh Government will consider the proposals at Stage Four of the process. After six weeks, Welsh Government may make an Order and there will then be an opportunity to write to Welsh Government with comments. The final Stage will be the electoral arrangements coming into force for the 2022 local government elections.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	A reduction in the number of members will result in a reduction in the budget required for Members' salaries.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	Members have been consulted through ward workshops, drop in sessions and an all member workshop.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	None specifically from this consultation.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1: Flintshire County Council Draft Response to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales draft proposals for Flintshire.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Electoral Reviews: Policy and Practice document 2016 http://ldbc.gov.wales/reviews/electoralreviews/58417614/?lang=en Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales Presentation to

	<p>Draft Proposals Report- Local Democracy & Boundary Commission for Wales Review of the Electoral Arrangements for Flintshire. https://ldbc.gov.wales/reviews/08-19/flintshire-draft-proposals</p> <p>Report of the Chief Executive and Chief Officer (Governance) <i>Local Democracy & Boundary Commission for Wales Local Review</i>, County Council 11th September</p> <p>Minute number 39 of County Council, <i>Local Democracy & Boundary Commission for Wales Local Review</i>, 11th September 2019</p> <p>Presentation slides for Electoral ward Workshop 28th October 2019.</p> <p>E mail from Cllr D Healey to Head of Democratic Services 7th October 2019</p> <p>E mail from Cllr H Brown to Head of Democratic Services 30th October 2019</p> <p>E mail from Cllr D Hughes Healey to Head of Democratic Services 31st October 2019</p> <p>E mail from Cllr M Bateman to Head of Democratic Services 1st November 2019</p> <p>E mail from Cllr R Dolphin to Head of Democratic Services 1st November 2019</p> <p>E mail from Cllr C Dolphin to Head of Democratic Services 1st November 2019</p> <p>Map of Saltney showing the line of Balderton Brook as a potential ward boundary.</p> <p>Email to Cllr G Banks, <i>Settlement Size Clarification</i> 4th November 2019</p> <p>Contact Officers: Robert Robins, Democratic Services Manager and Lynn Phillips, Electoral Services Manager</p> <p>Telephone: (01352) 702320/01352 702329</p> <p>E-mail: robert.robins@flintshire.gov.uk and lyn.phillips@flintshire.gov.uk</p>
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7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Electoral Parity: ensuring that across a council, all members represent, as near as possible, the same number of electors. In Flintshire's case, 65 members would produce wards with 1,836 electors per councillor. A 25% variance (an upper tolerance) would be between 2,295 electors per councillor and (a lower tolerance) 1,377 electors per councillor.</p> <p>Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (LDBC) : The role of the Commission is to keep under review all local government areas in Wales, and the electoral arrangements for the principal areas, and to make such proposals to the Welsh Government as seem desirable in the interests of effective and convenient local government.</p> <p>Local Government (Democracy) Wales Act 2013: An Act of the National Assembly for Wales to make provision about the constitution and functions of the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales; to make various provisions relating to local government; and for connected purposes.</p> <p>Electoral Review: A review of electoral arrangements for a local authority area.</p> <p>Council Size Methodology: A model the Commission has adopted for determining the size of Councils.</p>

	Assessment: 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 former Cabinet Secretary's desire for review of certain councils to be undertaken first.
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