

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 25 JUNE 2013**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

SUBJECT: **LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION
FOR WALES – CONSULTATION ON THE SIZE OF
COUNCIL**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To agree the Council's response to the consultation paper of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales on Council size.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales is required to carry out periodic reviews of the electoral arrangements for the 22 unitary authorities in Wales. The Commission uses the term "Council size" to describe the total number of Councillors to be elected to a Council.

2.02 In May 2012 the Commission produced a consultation paper setting out a preliminary view of how Council size may be determined as a precursor to an electoral review. That consultation paper was considered by the Council at its meeting on the 17 July 2012.

2.03 In summary the Council's response to that consultation was that there was insufficient information in that consultation paper to justify the proposed banding of Councils and the electorate to Councillor ratio. The Council also made the point that there should be more flexibility over the proposed number of seats identified at the initial stage of the process. The general response from all interested parties to that consultation was in favour of the approach based on the identification of the number of Councillors that would be appropriate but like Flintshire there was a general lack of support for the ratios proposed and the banding.

2.04 On the 27 March 2013 the Commission issued a fresh consultation paper and this is attached as appendix 1. Notwithstanding the consultation period ending on 19 June the Commission have agreed that the Council's observations will be considered if promptly submitted following the Council meeting. These proposals follow meetings with the WLGA and the Local Government Data Unit of Wales and contain a different methodology to that in the previous

consultation paper. It has also taken into account the methodology currently in place in Scotland where variations of geography, topography and population distribution are taken into account.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01 The method proposed in the consultation paper uses information relating to the population and distribution within authorities to enable a conclusion to be drawn on the relative urban and/or rural nature of the authority's area in demographic terms.
- 3.02 The first factor considered in the consultation paper is population density. The data suggests (see table in paragraph 2.3 of the consultation paper) there are four groups of local authorities in Wales in terms of population density (persons per hectare):-
- i. Those greater than 10 (only Cardiff)
 - ii. Those greater than 4.5 but less than 10 (8 Councils)
 - iii. Those greater than 2 but less 4.5 (4 Councils including Flintshire)
 - iv. Those less than 2 (9 Councils)
- 3.03 The second factor considered is urbanisation or the percentage of population living outside settlements with a population over 10,000. As this produces no clear indication of where the split should be made the consultation paper has proposed that the split be at 50% (see table in paragraph 2.5 of the consultation paper). Flintshire would be amongst the majority of Councils that have less than 50% of their population living outside such urban settlements.
- 3.04 These two factors have then led to the Commission dividing Councils into one of four categories as shown in the tables in paragraphs 2.8 and 2.9 of the consultation paper. Flintshire falling into the third category where it has an urban nature with a population density of more than 2 but less than 4.5.
- 3.05 Paragraph 2.11 of the consultation paper then proposes different ratios of electors to Councillors for the four different categories as shown in the table in paragraph 2.11. When these different ratios are applied it leads to the categorisation of Councillor allocation shown in the table in paragraph 2.12. This proposes Flintshire as having 61 Councillors.
- 3.06 In paragraph 3.3 of the consultation paper the Commission expressed the view that where the size of the Council is to vary by more than 10% this could have a significant impact on the running of the Council if it was applied as a result of a single electoral review. The Commission therefore proposes that there should not be a variation of more than 10% in any one review in moving towards the size of Council determined by the consultation model. In Flintshire's case

this would mean an initial reduction to 63 Councillors and then subsequently a further reduction to 61 as shown in the table in paragraph 4.1.

3.07 The majority of the consultation paper appears well reasoned. The one part of the proposed methodology that is most open to question is the 10% cap. Imposing the cap at 10% is going to prolong the process and create practical difficulties in determining the interim ward boundaries. It is considered that a preferable approach would be to recognise that the number of Councillors identified by the model is a flexible starting point especially for those Councils where the model leads to a change of more than 10% in the current membership. Once the review proceeds to consider the detail of ward boundaries it should help arrive at a practical arrangement if there is some flexibility over the number of Councillors.

3.08 The consultation paper raises a series of questions and attached as appendix 2 is the proposed response to those questions, together with further observations which the Council may wish to approve or amend as appropriate.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 The Council is invited to make its response to the consultation paper.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 None as a result of this report.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 None as a result of this report.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 None as a result of this report.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 None as a result of this report.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 None as a result of this report.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 None as a result of this report.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Consultation has taken place with Group Leaders.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Appendix 1 - Consultation paper
Appendix 2 - Proposed response to questions

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

Contact Officer: Peter Evans
Telephone: 01352 702304
Email: peter.j.evans@flintshire.gov.uk