



Comisiwn Ffiniau
Llywodraeth Leol
i Gymru



Local Government
Boundary Commission
for Wales

Electoral Reviews: Council Size Policy Consultation Paper

May 2012

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1. The Local Government 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 and by Directions issued by the Welsh Government.
2. The Commission published its 'Electoral reviews: policy and practice' paper on 12 March 2012. That paper does not include the Commission's approach to council size. Accordingly, this paper sets out the views of the Commission on how council size should be considered as part of an electoral review.
3. This consultation paper sets out the Commission's preliminary view and approach to how it believes council size should be determined, based on its experience, expertise and knowledge of local government.
4. The Commission's approach is outlined clearly within this consultation paper and the Commission welcomes all views on it so that it may determine its final approach. The Commission welcomes views from all interested parties, local authorities and individuals on how this approach can be improved. All views will be taken into account before the Commission comes to its final determination on how council size should be considered as part of an electoral review.
5. In particular, the Commission welcomes the view of those members who have served as councillors in the past but who no longer do so, particularly those who have most recently finished their term of office. We consider that these individuals may be able to provide a valuable insight into the benefits of the proposals laid out within this document.
6. Respondents are welcome to comment on any aspect of this paper. However, it would be particularly useful if the specific questions detailed at the end of this paper are addressed. Respondents are requested to send their views to the LGBCW by 16 July 2012. All comments should be emailed to lgbc.wales@wales.gsi.gov.uk or by post to;

The Secretary
Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales
Caradog House
1-6 St Andrews Place
Cardiff
CF10 3BE

What is Council Size?

7. The Commission uses the term 'council size' to describe the total number of councillors to be elected to the council.
8. The legislation does not specify how council size should be decided or at what point in the electoral review. The legislation and Minister's Directions set the parameters for how the Commission decides what the council size for a particular authority should be. This paper sets out how the Commission has interpreted the legislation and the Minister's Directions and describes how the Commission seeks to identify the appropriate council size for each authority that it is reviewing.
9. Council size is the starting point in any electoral review – the Commission cannot consider the patterns of divisions without first knowing the optimum number of electors per councillor, which is derived from dividing the electorate by the number of councillors to be elected to the authority.

Effective and Convenient Local Government

10. The term 'effective and convenient local government' comes from section 54 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972.
11. The Commission believes that providing an electoral scheme that provides for effective and convenient local government underpins all of its work and is the paramount and primary function of the Commission.
12. The Commission considers that council size is an important part of identifying an electoral scheme that provides for effective and convenient local government as the right number of members will provide the basis for the council to conduct its business in the most effective and efficient way.

The Commission's approach

13. The Commission notes that when the existing 22 authorities were established in 1996, the council sizes of each of the authorities were broadly established reflecting the council sizes of the existing constituent areas.
14. The then Commission later reviewed the electoral arrangements of each of these 22 authorities. While in some areas the council size changed marginally, broadly speaking the council size remained the same.
15. Accordingly, council size has not been considered as a specific policy issue to be considered beyond the limits of each individual review for many years. The Commission considers that there is a benefit in

considering how council size is established as a general principle outside the remit of a specific review.

16. When considering the issues that relate to council size, the Commission notes that there is a broad range in the councillor:elector ratios of authorities in Wales and that in some rural areas, there is a very high number of electors per member. The Commission also recognises that a high proportion of council seats across Wales are not contested at local elections. The Commission does not consider that this provides for a vibrant democracy and that effective and convenient local government is provided more effectively where seats are contested.
17. The Commission notes that the equivalent bodies who review electoral arrangements in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, all take a different approach to adopting council size.
18. In England, council size is established on a case by case basis and there is a separate stage at the beginning of the review whereby the Commission decides what council size should be adopted, bearing in mind the individual circumstances of the authority and area.
19. In Scotland, there is a banding approach, whereby cities, islands, population density and the population density of settlements are used to determine a category and subsequently a councillor:elector ratio.
20. In Northern Ireland, legislation sets out the number of wards for each authority under review which has a direct impact on the council size.
21. The different experiences and processes established across the UK demonstrate that there is no 'one size fits all' approach that should be adopted. This Commission believes that the process outlined within this consultation document is appropriate for establishing council size in Wales but welcomes views on how it may be amended to improve the process.

Banding

22. While all authorities are different, it can be helpful for councils, and others, to have an indication of what council size would be considered appropriate by the Commission for a particular authority.
23. While the Commission does not consider that identifying the optimum councillor:elector ratio to identify a specific council size will necessarily provide for effective and convenient local government, the Commission recognises that it can be helpful for councils and other interested parties to have a broad idea of what council size the Commission might consider is appropriate.

24. To support this, the Commission intends to adopt a banding approach that groups similar authorities together and identifies a council size, dependent on the band. This would be combined with discussions with each authority on the balancing factors described later in this document.
25. We broadly agree with the Minister's Direction to cap council size at a minimum of 30 and a maximum of 75 subject to the flexibility proposed in paragraph 31. We consider that very large or very small Councils cannot meet the test of effective and convenient local government.
26. The table below outlines the banding of authorities into 'Broadly Rural', 'Urban', 'Valley' and 'Other'. The Commission recognises that each of these categories do not comprise authorities that are uniformly alike. For example, while Cardiff and Newport are both urban authorities, the nature of them is quite different. However, the Commission considers that for the purposes of grouping similar authorities in order to determine that group's councillor:elector ratio, and consequently council size, they share characteristics that are common and which the Commission believes are satisfactory to use for the purposes of determining council size. The purpose of using categories is not to state that certain authorities are exactly alike but instead reflect that there are some shared characteristics that point towards a councillor:elector ratio that is reasonable and which provides four different categories in which to group the 22 principal authorities.
27. The Commission has proposed using four categories which were identified by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2008¹. The categories were identified following a consideration of how to define 'rural' Wales and which notes there are different measures that can be used, including sparsity, settlement size, and dispersion. The statistical bulletin published by Welsh Assembly Government notes that there is no single definition that applies for all purposes and that the larger the area, the harder it is to give a definition that accurately reflects the entirety of that area. The Commission agrees. However, it considers that these categories and the authorities identified within each category provide a reasonable means of classifying each authority for the purposes of identifying an appropriate council size.

¹ WAG Statistical Bulletin March 2008

Table 1: Classification of authorities

Rural – authorities with a predominantly rural composition	Carmarthenshire Ceredigion Conwy Denbighshire Gwynedd Isle of Anglesey Monmouthshire Pembrokeshire Powys
Urban – the most heavily populated areas	Cardiff Newport Swansea
Valley – populated areas confined by a unique physical environment.	Blaenau Gwent Caerphilly Merthyr Tydfil Rhondda Cynon Tâf Torfaen
Other – authorities which contain a mixture of rural and urban characteristics	Bridgend Flintshire Neath Port Talbot The Vale of Glamorgan Wrexham

28. Using these classifications, the Commission has calculated a council size proposal for each authority. The tables below show the council size that the Commission considers is reasonable for each authority and is minded to use as a basis for deciding council size.
29. This banding approach is intended as an aid to decision-making and to help focus authorities in their consideration of council size.
30. The Commission does not intend to use this banding in a prescriptive manner and considers that a council size of plus or minus three from the 'proposal' figure identified would be satisfactory, in clearly defined circumstances.
31. The Commission intends to have discussions with each authority under review, and as a result of those discussions the Commission may be persuaded to adopt a council size beyond plus or minus three from the figure identified through the banding approach. Where the banding approach provides for an authority to have 30 or 75 councillors the Commission reserves the right to provide for fewer than 30 or more than 75 members if a better fit with the statutory criteria can be achieved compared with the capped limits. The Commission would expect an authority who proposes to have a council size outside these limits to provide additional justification to support their view.

Table 2: Proposals for council size for ‘rural’ authorities.

‘Rural’ Unitary Authority	Electorate 2011	Existing number of councillors	Number of councillors proposed under banding
Carmarthenshire	138,122	74	75*
Ceredigion	56,476	42	32
Conwy	91,246	59	52
Denbighshire	74,798	47	43
Gwynedd	86,144	75	49
Isle of Anglesey	49,484	40	30*
Monmouthshire	70,663	43	40
Pembrokeshire	93,120	60	53
Powys	102,855	73	59
TOTAL	762,908	513	433

32. The Commission considers that these authorities should have a council size that provides for each member representing approximately 1,750 electors.
33. *Carmarthenshire would be allocated 79 councillors under this banding approach but has been capped at 75, as a result of the Minister’s Direction
34. *Anglesey would be allocated 28 councillors but has been allocated 30 members as a result of the Direction.

Table 3: Proposals for council size for ‘urban’ authorities

‘Urban’ Unitary Authority	Electorate 2011	Existing number of councillors	Number of councillors proposed under banding
Cardiff	250,711	75	75*
Newport	105,342	50	42
Swansea	185,058	72	74
TOTAL	541,111	197	191

35. The Commission considers that these authorities should have a council size that provides for each member representing approximately 2,500 electors.
36. The Commission considered that the average councillor:elector ratio using the existing Newport and Swansea figures would provide a fair councillor:elector ratio for all these urban areas. Because the electorate of Cardiff is so large, it is felt that it would create an anomaly if its figures were used to calculate the appropriate council size for these authorities.
37. Accordingly, the number of councillors proposed under the banding approach has been calculated on the basis of 2,500. This is the electorate of Swansea and Newport (290,400) divided by the total number of members currently representing these authorities (122). This leads to a figure of 2,380, rounded to 2,500.
38. *Cardiff has been capped at 75, as a result of the Minister’s Direction.

Table 4: Proposals for council size for ‘valley’ authorities

‘Valley’ Unitary Authority	Electorate 2011	Existing number of councillors	Number of councillors proposed under banding
Blaenau Gwent	53,527	42	30*
Caerphilly	128,977	73	55
Merthyr Tydfil	43,597	33	30*
Rhondda Cynon Tâf	176,144	75	75
Torfaen	69,951	44	30
TOTAL	472,196	267	220

39. The Commission considers that these authorities should have a council size that provides for each member representing approximately 2,350 electors.
40. The Commission notes the reduction in council size from the existing arrangements that this banding approach would provide for, in a number of these ‘valley’ authorities. However, the Commission considers that a councillor:elector ratio broadly between urban and rural authorities is viable and sensible.
41. *Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil would be allocated 23 and 19 councillors respectively under this ratio, but have both been allocated 30 members as a result of the Direction.

Table 5: Proposals for council size for ‘other’ authorities

‘Other’ Unitary Authority	Electorate 2011	Existing number of councillors	Number of councillors proposed under banding
Bridgend	103,345	54	56
Flintshire	116,452	70	63
Neath Port Talbot	110,167	64	60
The Vale of Glamorgan	94,102	47	51
Wrexham	102,041	52	55
TOTAL	526,107	287	285

42. The Commission considers that these authorities should have a council size that provides for each member representing approximately 1,850 electors.
43. The ‘number of councillors proposed under banding’ figure for the ‘Other’ authorities has been identified by calculating the average councillor:elector ratio for these existing authorities. This is 1,833 (526,107 divided by 287), rounded to 1,850.

Discussion with authority under review

44. The Commission considers that before taking any decisions on electoral schemes, it should understand the role of the councillor in the area where it is conducting an electoral review in order to help inform its decision on the appropriate council size.
45. Research commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government² which reviewed the role and function of elected members summarised that the various roles of members were:
- decision making;
 - overview and scrutiny;
 - ward representation; and
 - partnership working and community leadership
46. The Commission considers that an understanding of how these roles fit together within a particular authority can give an indication of how

² Review of the Role and Function of Elected Members, CRG Research 2007

many members that authority needs to provide for effective and convenient local government and that this can be used in conjunction with the banding approach.

47. The Commission welcomes a discussion with the council at the beginning of a review to discuss how these factors work in the council under review to determine the best council size, within the banding approach outlined above.
48. The Commission will wish to understand, through discussions with senior officers and Group Leaders, how many members are required to address the following aspects of council business, as identified by the CRG Research 2007:
 - a. To provide effective community leadership at a strategic level (developing the community strategy, working with partners etc.)
 - b. To represent the council in the outside world (to the Welsh Government, UK government and others)
 - c. To represent the needs and interests of local electoral [wards] to the council and other bodies (including dealing with case work on behalf of individual constituents)
 - d. To conduct effective scrutiny of the council policies and performance
 - e. To conduct effective scrutiny of other agencies (e.g. health trusts)
 - f. To provide effective political management of the authority.
49. The Commission recognises that the representation role (point c above) is an important part of the role councillors play. The 2007 Research noted that 'when asked to outline what they saw as the main role of councillors almost all interviewees reported that it was first and foremost to represent their wards'. Some councillors have noted during previous reviews that council size should not be reduced as this would reduce the ability for members to carry out their representation role effectively, as the number of electors per councillor would increase as a result of a decrease in council size.
50. The Commission will seek to understand the other aspects of a councillor's role in the cases on individual authorities, to gauge how these roles have an implication on the most appropriate council size. The Commission recognises that this will be different in every council as every council works in a different way and has different opportunities and challenges.
51. The Commission considers that a combined approach of using the banding as well as discussion with the authority under review will provide for the best council size.

Minister's Directions

The Councillor:elector ratio

52. The Minister's Direction issued in 2009 states 'it is considered that the aim should be to achieve electoral divisions with a councillor to electorate ratio no lower than 1:1,750'.
53. The Commission considers that this guidance could provide the necessary framework for establishing council size and councillor:elector ratios for each authority under review. The Minister may choose to withdraw his Direction but will retain the option of issuing Directions for specific areas or for particular circumstances. Alternatively, the Direction or a revised Direction may be issued to cover all reviews.
54. Parliament did not set out in legislation how many members each authority should have. However, in his Direction issued in 2009, the Minister gave the Commission indicators that directly relate to council size. This Commission considers that this banding approach whereby a councillor:elector ratio has been identified that does not provide for each authority having a ratio of 1:1,750 is likely to better reflect the different challenges faced by authorities than a single figure. The Commission has always interpreted the Direction as guidance, as the Minister clarified it should be used. The Commission has used its expertise and discretion to identify a councillor:elector ratio for each authority within a band which in its view would provide for effective and convenient local government.

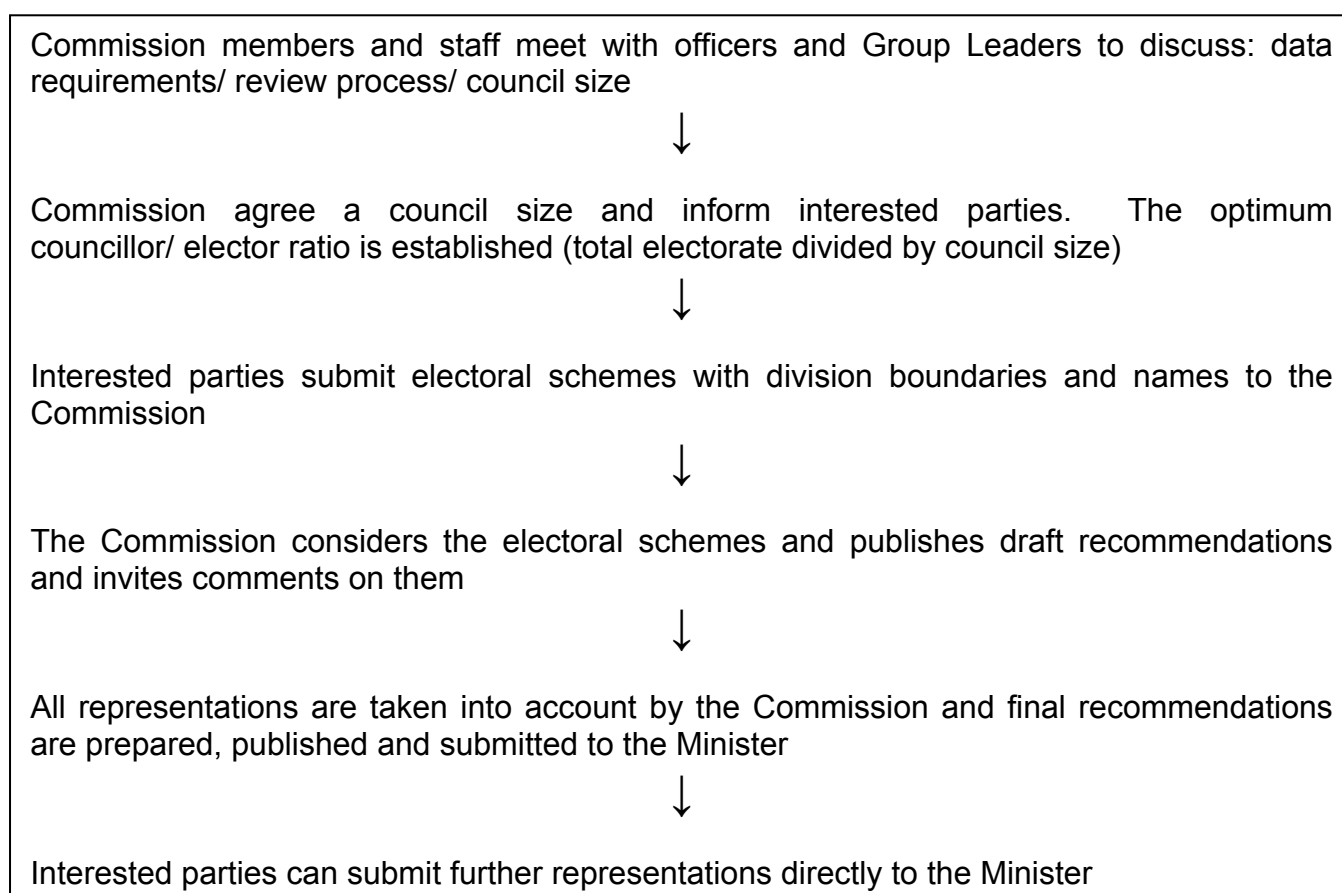
The geography and composition of the area

55. In addition to considering the banding approach and the discussion with the council, the Commission will consider other factors to identify the most appropriate council size.
56. When the Commission started the round of reviews starting in 2008, it sought to identify what council size would best provide for a good level of electoral equality. It did this by considering the size of communities and community wards which are used as the building blocks for electoral divisions and consider which council sizes within a range would provide for a good level of electoral equality.
57. The size of communities and community wards will continue to be a factor in identifying a council size that will provide for divisions that can be based on the Communities and which will provide for a reasonable level of electoral parity.

Procedure for establishing council size as part of an electoral review

58. As set out in the 'electoral reviews: policy and procedure' consultation document, Commission members and officials will meet members and senior officers of the council in advance of the review starting to discuss the procedure of the review, data requirements and to address how the review will be conducted generally. The Commission considers that at these meetings, the issue of council size should also be addressed. Group Leaders on the council should give their views on what membership is appropriate, in the context of how the council works and how it is envisaged to work in the future.
59. Following this discussion, the Commission will agree a council size at a formal commission meeting and subsequently inform those interested parties in the area what that council size is, and accordingly what the councillor:elector ratio is. This will allow all those interested in contributing to the review to create and submit a scheme to the Commission, based on the agreed council size.

The electoral review process:



Balancing all the factors contributing to council size

60. The Commission recognises that all authorities are different. The Commission will seek to balance the factors that influence council size as set out by the Minister's Directions, and balance the geography and size of communities to come up with a recommendation that improves the existing arrangements.
61. The Commission believes that engaging with the council at an early stage of the process, in particular in relation to the role of the councillor, will lead to an electoral scheme which reflects how the council works and how it aspires to work in the future, whilst reflecting the communities and geography of the area.
62. The Commission considers that these discussions alongside a banding approach will lead to the establishment of a council size that will provide the best electoral scheme.
63. The Commission welcomes your views on the approach outlined in this consultation document and in particular your response to the questions outlined below. Please write to us with your views by **16 July 2012**.

Questions to local authorities and other interested parties on the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales' consultation on its approach to council size.

General

1. Do you consider that outlining a detailed approach to adopting a particular council size is helpful?

Banding

2. Do you think that the principle of banding is useful when considering council size?
3. Do you think the four categories of 'urban', 'rural', 'valley' and 'other' are appropriate? Do you think that each authority has been allocated to the relevant category?
4. Do you think that the councillor:elector ratio for each category of authorities is appropriate? If not, what ratio is better and why?

Discussion with authority under review

5. Do you think it is helpful for the Commission and Council to have detailed discussions at the start of the review process about what the council size should be?
6. Do you agree that the areas of council business identified in paragraph 48 of this consultation document are all pertinent issues, relevant to council size?

This guidance has been prepared on the basis of the existing legislation and Directions. The Commission must conduct all electoral reviews within this framework until any changes are introduced by legislation or in Minister's Directions. However, the Commission welcomes views on what, if any, changes should be made to the legislation for conducting electoral reviews in the future, in relation to matters relevant to council size:

7. Do you consider there should be a range of council sizes for authorities to fall between? Do you think 30 to 75 is an appropriate range?
8. Do you consider there should be a councillor:elector ratio for authorities to aim towards? Should it be different for different authorities?
9. If the proposals contained in this Policy are accepted by the Minister, do you consider that the current Directions are needed? If you are in favour of the Direction, please give the reasons for your view.

Please submit your views to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales by 16 July 2012. They can be submitted in writing or by email:

The Secretary
Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales
Caradog House
1-6 St Andrews Place
Cardiff
CF10 3BE

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