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Consultation – summary of responses

Analysis of Response to Consultation – Draft Directions to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales

Date of issue: **March 2016**

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Analysis of Responses to Consultation - Draft Directions to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales

Summary of Responses

Audience

This document is aimed at all those with an interest in the Draft Directions to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales

Overview

This is a summary of the responses to a consultation exercise issued by the Welsh Government on the Draft Directions to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales

Action required

None - for information only

Further Information

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Additional copies

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1. Introduction

1.1 The consultation on draft directions to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales in relation to electoral reviews of proposed county areas was issued on 17th August 2015, in preparation for directions to be issued under sections 16 and 17 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 2015. The consultation period finished on 9th November 2015.

1.2 We received 62 responses to the consultation in total.

1.3 The respondents can be categorised as follows:-

Local Authorities	11
Community and Town Councils	15
Elected Members (AMs / Councillors)	11
Representative bodies / Professional body or Associations	8
Members of the public	10
Political groups	7

1.4 A list of respondents is included in section 6.

1.5 The consultation asked for views on the following questions:-

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

Question 2: Do you think there are a minimum number of councillors required to ensure the effective and democratic working of a local authority? If so, what is it and why?

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

Question 4: Do you think that there should be a cap on the maximum number of elected members per local authority? If so, what do you think the maximum number should be and why?

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

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

Question 7: Do you agree that commonly used Welsh language names for wards do not also need an English language equivalent? If not, do you think that each ward should have an English and Welsh name?

1.6 A summary of responses under each of the specific questions asked in the consultation is provided below.

Individual responses are available to view if requested.

2. Overview of Consultation process

Of the 62 responses to the consultation, 50/50 completed the full and everyday versions of the online form questionnaire and free-form responses. This chapter of the report is intended to be a summary of all responses to the consultation, and therefore does not list details of every response received.

3. Summary of responses

Q1. Do you think the suggested ratio provides for effective and convenient local government?

Comments included:

Most respondents state that the Member elector ratio of 1:4,000 is too large and this will weaken local democracy with fewer councillors representing much larger electoral wards. A couple of respondents worry that the suggested ratio does not consider rural areas such as Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. One respondent suggests that the merged Pembrokeshire/Carmarthenshire/Ceredigion authority would have about 95 councillors as against a current total of 176; a reduction of almost 50% and a cut in the number of councillors may not enable the diversity of the current authorities to be properly represented.

Another respondent's view is that these proposals do not reflect rurality and are inappropriate for a rural dispersed area. The ratio applied is solely based on the number of electors and does not take into account total population and seasonal population arising e.g. from tourism and second homes.

Some respondents suggest these proposals could erode local democracy and the role and function of local government leading to an over centralist model of governance in Wales. They think there should be no further reduction in the number of councillors in order to safeguard democratic arrangements, recognising that there are many challenges in terms of Member workload in multi member wards.

Another respondent shares a similar view regarding the diversity and geography of landscapes in this region.

One respondent's view is that the proposed ratio of one councillor to every 4,000 electors is entirely arbitrary. They believe that a more considered approach to the ratio should be adopted, addressing such issues as the workload of councillors, the changing nature of councillors' roles, and the characteristics, in terms of population but also of geography of the area they

represent. Also, they mention the draft directions are based on the Welsh Government's proposed map announced by the Minister for Public Services in June 2015 and that they are being asked to comment on proposals which are based on much bigger councils, proposals which have not yet been ratified.

Another respondent addressed the issue of councillors' workload stating that the proposed ratio cuts the number of councillors in half whilst at the same time applying a universal standard irrespective of the size or make-up of the local council. This means that no allowance has been made with regards to the geography or different workloads that councillors may have in different wards. A councillor representing an urban, deprived area for example, may have more casework than one representing a more affluent community. Account must also be taken of the role of councillors representing their local authority on outside bodies, this also adds to workloads.

Finally the respondent believes ratios should be applied as appropriate to each council.

One public body commented on the proposed ratio and said the creation of a general ratio of electors per councillor combined with the Boundary Commission's duty to provide for effective local government and electoral parity will restrict the ability of the Boundary Commission's to have proper regard to the additional factors it must consider. This is exacerbated by their nature and location of Wales' communities, geography and demography.

One professional association felt that larger Local Authorities and in particular Local Planning Authorities would give rise to concerns regarding the ability to connect with local communities. They commented that the perception of remoteness is an issue at present, particularly the large rural counties, and would be significantly more difficult to address if authorities were geographically larger and lacked a sense of identity that traditional counties have. Consideration should be given to the changes set out in the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 as well as Members' work in relation to planning applications, local plan consultations, plus the role of planning committee members.

One public body does not believe that a specific councillor to elector ratio can be proposed in advance of wider local government reforms and the proposed ratio that should be 'no smaller than 1 councillor to 4,000 electors' could create complex and (in rural areas) geographically large wards. They expressed concern that this may impact on other Welsh Government priorities, notably ambitions for a more diverse local democracy.

Finally, a respondent highlighted that the consultation document does not mention the ratio for community councillors. Also these proposals could have an adverse effect on those individuals that work and/or have other commitments who would find it very difficult to stand for election and this could have a big impact at the next elections.

Comments

Some of the positive comments provided by respondents included:

“Yes - Should be between 4000 to 5000 residents per councillor.....”

Other respondents, while agreeing with the proposal in general, voiced a note of caution, making comments such as:-

”Yes - By reducing the number of councillors and increasing the ratio it would be prudent to increase the salary of councillors to make it a full time role...”

Where respondents did not agree with this proposal, some comments included:

“..No, we do not. There should be a one councillor to every 2,000 electors in view of fact that often councillors have part time employment on part time salaries and cannot be expected to serve more electors effectively...”

“..No - Any all Wales figure should be a guideline only not a prescriptive figure as it does not take into account the geographical spread in rural areas and the extra demands that may exist in, for example, a deprived area. This figure is considerably higher than any average figures which have been mentioned previously in boundary reviews....”

Conclusion

The majority of respondents do not agree with the 1:4,000 ratio, mainly citing that larger wards will have a detrimental effect on local democracy, particularly in rural areas where wards would be very large. However, no consensus emerges as to a suitable alternative.

Q2. Do you think there is a minimum number of councillors required to ensure the effective and democratic working of a local authority? If so, what is it and why?

The majority of respondents agreed with this proposal.

One respondent believed the minimum number should be between 60 to maximum of 75

One political group believes there is a need for a minimum number of councillors and that the numbers should depend on the following factors, the demographics of the local authority, how many town and community councils it has within its borders, what the Welsh Government decides county councils will have responsibility for e.g. will Welsh Government decide that certain planning applications are no longer decided at county council level.

One political group believes that regarding the numbers of councillors should be flexible and dependent on the size of local authorities, particularly thinking of future mergers.

One respondent thinks there needs to be a sufficiently large number of members to be able to undertake the various roles and responsibilities required such as Cabinet, scrutiny, planning and regulatory committees. The minimum number could be 45 but with some flexibility e.g. + or – 10%.

One council proposes that the Directions should not specify a maximum or minimum number of elected members but should 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. They think it should be left to the Boundary Commission to determine and for the council to then be consulted upon.

Another council thinks that a relatively small number of councillors can place an additional burden on councillors, especially those involved in Overview and Scrutiny. This is because once the executive or chairs of regulatory committees are filled, there are comparatively few councillors who are eligible or have sufficient time to fulfil these roles. They think that the new authorities will require at least 40 Members.

Comments

Some of the comments included:

“...No but maximum elector / councillor ratios ought to be considered to ensure democracy / sufficient representation at local level..”

“..Yes - The current accepted minimum of 30 is an absolute minimum. Effective scrutiny cannot take place if there are insufficient members to sit on scrutiny committees and hold the Executive to account. However, those councils which currently have a small number of elected members are surely too small to be effective anyway, which will be addressed by reorganisation....”

Conclusion

Most respondents agree there is a minimum number of councillors required to ensure the effective and democratic working of a local authority, although there are varying views on what that number should be (some say 30, others say more), and that this is also dependent on demographics, poverty, local authority sizes and future local government mergers.

Q3. Do you think a minimum number of elected members per local authority should be specified in the Draft Directions?

The majority of responses agreed with this proposal.

One respondent agrees with this proposal and believes 75 is a sufficient number to deal with council work.

Another respondent believes that the Draft Directions should take into account the governance needs of running a modern council. Again geographical factors should be considered including travelling times to fulfil council business.

One community council agrees with the proposal that there should be a minimum number of elected members per local authority specified in the Draft Directions.

Some respondents do not agree with the proposal and think the numbers of councillors needs to come about as part of a proper review for each authority area.

Comments

Some of the positive comments provided by respondents included:

“ ...Clear guidance has often been missing leading to Councils getting into a mess....”

“..Yes, If the ratio of Councillors to electors is specified, and the size of local authorities, based upon geographic and demographic considerations, is specified, then it follows that the number of elected members will be determined automatically....”

“...Yes - to ensure that all Local Authorities have an appropriate number of elected members to be effective...”

Other respondents disagreed and provided the following comments:

“...No. This is a matter the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission can determine....”

“...No - there is no one size fits all approach and each local authority area should be considered based on its individual characteristics...”

Conclusion

The majority of respondents agree with this proposal indicating that specifying a minimum of councillors in the directions would give LDBCW clear guidance.

Q4. Do you think that there should be a cap on the maximum number of elected members per local authority? If so, what do you think the maximum number should be and why?

The majority of responses agreed that there should be a cap on the number of elected members per local authority.

One respondent is of the view is that any council with more than 85 members is difficult to manage and thinks a cap would also meet the Welsh Government's objective of a substantial cut in the number of councillors, though not such a drastic cut as the proposed ratio would achieve.

One respondent is of the view, stating that otherwise, councils will become too unwieldy and there will be a lack of involvement for many back benchers. Local Authorities need to be of a manageable size.

Another respondent believes the maximum number needs to be limited in order for meeting to be manageable and workable and also for accountability. 80-90 councillors should be the maximum. Council sizes should not be so large as to require more.

One council believes it makes sense to have some sort of a cap but it should reflect the locality for an individual council.

One respondent commented that they do not agree with the proposal and consider that the number of elected members should be based on the population, and for effective local democracy the ratio should be 1:2000, as per the 'Council Size Policy' produced by the Boundary Commission in 2013. It should be a 'bottom up' approach based on the demography of the communities.

Another council also disagrees with this proposal and states that the numbers will vary according to the local communities and this will be different across Wales. Each should be judged on its own merit. This council has both urban and rural settlements and needs to be judged in this light. As the local population changes which is a natural part of community development, and is considered within Local Development Plans, a cap will present further issues for a local area.

Comments

Some of the positive comments provided by respondents included:

"Yes- Based on a ratio of electors of 1:4,000 this would suggest a size of just under 110 councillors for what would become "Gwent". Whilst this is larger than ideal, in our view it is possible for a body of this size to work. We suggest a cap of 110 councillors. Whilst a meeting of 110 people will be demanding to chair, we are confident that councils will have members with the skills to do this. This is notwithstanding the practical and logistical realities of accommodating 110 councillors..."

“...Yes - 80. Too many will result in endless fruitless discussion...”

“..Yes - members of this council consider that a council of more than 75 members could be too unwieldy and that the current cap should therefore be retained....”

Not many respondents disagreed with this proposal; this is one of the few comments:

“....No - There should not be a cap on the maximum number of elected members per local authority....”

Conclusion

There is a general consensus that there should be a cap on councillor numbers, but a variety of views on what that cap should be.

Q5. Do you agree that each ward within a local authority area should have roughly the same number of electors per elected member?

There was a mixed response to this proposal, about a 50/50 split.

One respondent agrees with the proposal and says that currently some wards are not equal, so a smaller ward has more attention than a bigger one.

One respondent commented that parity should be sought across electoral wards so that they have roughly the same number of electors per elected member because this will help spread the workload of councillors more evenly across the new local authority area. However, caution needs to be exercised when reviewing electoral ward boundaries. The methodology for such should not just be restricted to a specific ratio.

Another respondent agrees that the numbers should be as equal as possible taking into account the population and whether the ward is rural and geographically widespread.

One respondent does not agree with the proposal, he thinks wards with high deprivation and social housing generate far more casework than a suburban ward and this must be factored into the ratio calculation as does traveling in purely rural wards.

One town council also does not agree and states that there would be no particular merit in striving for equality of numbers for each ward, although neither should there be radically marked differences in the number of electors per ward. There will be factors to consider, such as geographical spread, which will be important considerations if a councillor is to be able to effectively represent his or her constituency.

Finally, one respondent commented that they do not agree with the proposal and state that the culture and demographics should be considered as a priority over even numbers.

Comments

Positive comments included

”....Yes - For reasons of fairness. Wards must be set out taking into account geography and existing boundaries though eg not cutting across community council areas or constituency boundaries.....”

“....Yes - Council agrees with the proposal that each ward within a local authority area should have roughly the same number of electors per elected member, but only within the local geographic constraints, and should avoid splitting communities or estates....”

“...."Yes- This is fundamental to the new arrangements resulting in fair electoral outcomes. It is pre-requisite for effective local government. Our interpretation of “roughly” is that the vast majority wards should be +/- 25% of the target ratio. There will be some instances where the difference in ratio will be greater than this, for instance, to avoid splitting a distinct urban area, or maintaining a distinct rural area, such as a peninsular, as a single unit. As well as wards having the same number of electors, our preference would be for single-member wards.”

Where respondents did not agree with this proposal, comments included:

“....If this is adopted rural areas will have little representation as the population is widespread and lacks the concentration of the electors in a city and large urban area....”

“...No, rurality and high density of population have different impacts on a councillors work load i.e. rural areas often have different issues with greater distances involved to more compact higher populated urban areas...”

“...No - This should not be the key driver since the distinct nature of communities, population profile need to be recognised as priority considerations...”

Conclusion

There were mixed views on this proposal highlighting the complexities of providing for effective representation in practice.

Q6. What effect should the particular characteristics of an area have on the number of councillors needed to represent the population?

There were a variety of views on the question of what effect the particular characteristics of an area should have on the number of councillors needed to represent the population.

One public organisation believes that these characteristics ought to be taken into account, particularly in relation to rural areas.

One respondent highlighted that rural areas without the density of population in urban areas do not have the same issues regarding poverty, housing need but local services must be available to all and in some semi-rural settlements the council tax banding is very high and there is a demand for services such as grass cutting, rural transport etc. which may not be priorities in large urban areas. Consideration must be given to the wide areas covered by councillors in rural communities and representation based on electoral numbers must be different to urban areas to achieve fair representation.

One council commented in their response that the following factors should be considered when reviewing the ward arrangements; overall population, rurality issues, geographical challenges, Welsh language, student population, areas of deprivation and areas where there is density of population.

Another council raised the issues around longer travelling times to and from meetings and for face to face meetings with constituents. Larger wards also make canvassing for elections more difficult, as is regular communication with residents by means of newsletters. Larger wards in bigger counties will mean that a number of wards will end up being a mixture of urban and rural. A lack of public transport increases the impracticality of canvassing. They think a balance needs to be drawn between reducing numbers and ensuring appropriate representation.

Another community council suggests the following factors, cohesiveness of communities or estates, access to councillors e.g. consideration of transport, distance, broadband connectivity and the bottom 20% in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2014.

Finally, one respondent believes characteristics should not be considered, rural or town, it is the ratio of electors to member that matter.

Comments

Comments included the following,

“...Residents in deprived areas are likely to generate more casework as they are generally less likely to be able to represent themselves in some instances. There is also likely to be a higher number of instances of issues with social services and housing for example. Geography has to be taken into account, ease of access, and as mentioned previously no

crossing over of other boundaries. This may affect the ratio in some parts...”

“..Due consideration should be given to the mixture of Welsh and English speaking communities, the geography of an area (particularly when that area is rural) and maintenance of an electoral area's identity....”

“...The effect of particular characteristics should be to increase the number of councillors where appropriate. Characteristics to be considered should include: geographical spread; cultural diversity; Welsh and English language communities; social and economic issues; distinguishing employment characteristics such as tourism, agriculture, manufacturing industries, etc.....”

Conclusion

There were a range of different views but most agreed that particular factors should be borne in mind when considering the number of councillors needed to represent a population.

Q7. Do you agree that commonly used Welsh language names for wards do not also need an English language equivalent? If not, do you think that each ward should have an English and Welsh name?

All agreed with this proposal.

It was broadly agreed by the strong majority of respondents that the principle of retaining commonly used Welsh name should be kept, there being no requirement for creating English language equivalent names.

However, there were a couple of respondents that disagreed with one commenting that since Wales has a Welsh Language Act which recognises that Wales has two equally important languages. That works both ways; the majority do not speak Welsh. Using a new Welsh name, imposed where there only used to be a commonly used English name would be divisive.

Comments

Comments included were,

“..One Welsh Language name should be sufficient however it is important that there is diversity in the names to allow easy distinction between various wards i.e. no two wards should have the same or similar sounding names. One Welsh name should be sufficient however, it is important that care is given to which name as there needs to be sufficient diversity in the names to allow easy distinction between various wards i.e. no two wards should have the same or similar sounding names...”

“..Yes - Giving a ward which is known by a Welsh language name an English equivalent is totally unnecessary and, dare I say, would be a completely pointless exercise as the ward would always be known by its traditional name. [Mawr ward in Swansea would be translated as 'big'. Would anyone living in Mawr prefer to say that they lived in Big? Let's be sensible on this...”

“...Commonly used Welsh language names for wards should not have a fabricated English translation and similarly English names for wards , used for many years should not have a Welsh translation...”

Conclusion

It was agreed that commonly used Welsh language names for wards do not also need an English language equivalent.

4. Next steps

All the issues outlined in the summary will be considered before final directions are published later this year.

5. Annex

List of respondents

Peter Black AM - 001

Anonymous – 002

Anonymous - 003

Cllr Richard Bertin - 004

Rhondda Cynon Taff Welsh Liberal Democrats - 005

Anonymous - 006

Cllr Keith Hayden -007

Matthew Voisey -008

Cllr Paul Mitchell -009

Anonymous -010

Cyfartha Labour Party - 011

Anonymous -012

Llanelli Rural Council -013

Local Democracy Boundary Commission for Wales -014

Tenby Town Council -015

Anonymous - 016

Anonymous - 017

Anonymous - 018

Anonymous - 019

Nelson Labour Party - 020

Anonymous -021

Independents@Swansea - 022

Conwy County Borough Council - 023

North and Mid Wales Association of Local Councils - 024

Vale of Glamorgan Council - 025

Anonymous - 026
Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn Town Council - 027
Anonymous - 028
Denbigh Town Council - 029
Bay of Colwyn Town Council - 030
Anonymous - 031
Anonymous -032
Llandudno Town Council -033
Anonymous - 034
Welsh Language Commissioner – 035
Anonymous – 036
Anonymous – 037
Anonymous – 038
Pembrokeshire County Council -039
Anonymous - 040
Anonymous – 041
Anonymous -042
Iago Siôn - 043
Anonymous - 044
Anonymous -045
Anonymous - 046
Anonymous - 047
Anglesey Council - 048
Llanfrynach Community Council – 049
One Voice Wales - 050
Anonymous - 051
Marcus Rose - 052
Anonymous - 053
Hywel Roberts-054
Anonymous -055
Anonymous -056
Anonymous -057
Anonymous -058
Anonymous -059
Anonymous -060
Anonymous- 061
Anonymous -062

34 respondents either requested to remain anonymous or did not request anonymity in their responses to the consultation but commented on the issues, and their comments have been taken into account.