

MEETING:	Full Council
DATE:	2 March 2017
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn
TITLE:	LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES REVIEW
AIM:	To obtain the Council's permission for officers to produce draft proposals for the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales during the pre-election period in order to meet the challenging timetable.
OFFICER:	Vera Jones, Democratic Services Manager and Sion Huws, Senior Solicitor (Corporate)

SUMMARY

1. The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales is required to carry out periodic reviews of the electoral arrangements of principal areas in Wales. The Commission has notified the Council that it will now carry out a review of the electoral arrangements in Gwynedd, with the aim of considering and developing proposals for future electoral arrangements, to be implemented at the time of the local government elections proposed for 2022..
2. All Members were invited to an initial meeting with the Boundary Commission for Wales on 9 February 2017, where the Commission explained the requirements, arrangements, methodology, work programme and timetable. It was explained that the Commission would welcome the Council's comments prior to the Commission producing its draft proposals. In particular that they would want the Council to produce a plan or plans for the electoral divisions for consideration based on the current communities and community wards. It was noted that there were ongoing discussions with the Council on the timetable.
3. It is fair to note that this is an exceptional situation in Gwynedd. On the one hand, the review was prioritised in Gwynedd by the Minister as Gwynedd has been through a similar review in 2012 (but was not implemented by the previous minister). On the other hand, the original timetable outlined for presenting initial draft proposals in May is unrealistic due to the upcoming Local Government Elections during the same period, with the Electoral Period starts on 17th March. It is evidently important to ensure that the views of the newly elected members are considered as part of the process.
4. It is therefore considered that the Council has two options;
 - a) to find a compromise with the Boundary Commission on the original timetable and for submitting initial draft proposals.

b) to await the Boundary Commission's draft proposals, therefore not submitting any initial draft proposals from the Council in line with the timetable.

5. In order to be proactive and implement option 4a), officers have looked at the possibilities of drawing up a sensible work programme which would ensure that the Members of the new Council are able to comment, whilst also adhering to the Boundary Commission's timetable requirements. We have been given to understand that it will be possible for the Council to present proposals to them by the middle of June, although the end of May is the official closing date published by them.
6. Implementing option 4a) would require officers to draw up initial draft proposals during the pre-election period. It is possible to draw attention to the observations presented on the review in 2012 as the basis for that.
7. The next step would be to consult with the members of the new Council on the draft proposals early in May 2017. This would be followed by a report to the Audit Committee, and then to the Full Council meeting during June 2017 in order for the Council to decide on the proposals to be submitted to the Commission.
8. One of the big weaknesses of the 2012 proposals in the view of the Council was the increase in the number of multi-member electoral divisions. Therefore, if the Council wanted to look at such areas and any other observations in the proposed review, it may be necessary for officers to discuss with members in those areas and the relevant community councils. This is all if it is possible because the electoral period runs across the consultation period.
9. In deciding on option 4b), namely not submitting any initial draft proposals to the Commission, the Council would be open to a risk of missing an opportunity to propose full arguments to the Commission, which could lead to a situation of having to accept the Commission's proposals, which may not be based on such a full understanding of the local area.
10. It is therefore recommended that the Council takes a pro-active approach in order to present initial draft proposals to the Commission within an amended timetable to be mutually agreed. The Council's permission is required to follow the steps noted below in order to proceed as follows:
 - Pre-election period: officers to draw up initial draft proposals and to consult (where required and possible because of the timetable) with relevant members and community councils
 - Consult with all members of the new Council following the election on the initial draft proposals
 - The Audit Committee (as the body responsible for governance) to look at the proposals and observations by members and decide on the draft recommendations to be submitted to the Council
 - The Full Council in June 2017 to decide on the proposals to be submitted to the Commission