

DRAFT DIRECTIONS TO THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL BY THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

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

No. The ratio is completely inappropriate for a rural dispersed area. At the moment, the current ratio for Gwynedd as a county is 1,089 with Gwynedd wards range between 480 and 2,428 electors with the two largest having two members.

An approach of using a simple ratio regarding the number of electors does raise concerns. That pays no regard to the workload of local councillors that can arise from students who have not registered, seasonal population arising from tourism and second homes.

It also goes completely against the direction that the Welsh Government set out in its consultation document (Reforming Local Government – Power to Local People” which talks of the importance of “Councillor-led community governance”. It is difficult to see how councillors can cope with this challenging role on top of their institutional responsibilities as committee members etc if they are to serve such large electorates.

If such a move did take place, there would have to be a move to a system of full-time councillors in order to shoulder that workload.

Question 2: 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?

Some minimum is required for effective democracy but the sort of figures noted are far too small. Within the Cabinet system, with a need for about 10 members on a cabinet, that leaves the rest of the Council’s work (Scrutiny, Audit, Planning, Licensing) on too small a number of councillors placing unreasonable pressures on them. The minimum number of members should be at least 45-50 members.

The above comments are based on views of the current councils’ workload. That would obviously increase significantly following re-organisations in areas such as Planning and Licensing, with the number of applications requiring attention increasing.

The other issue to consider is that the allocation of seats to political groups may prove more complex on councils with smaller numbers. It could be harder to fill seats and the burden on a small group of councillors could increase.

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

Yes, as explained in the answer to Question 2. The Draft Directions should recognise the governance needs of running a modern council. However, once that has happened, each council should be considered separately considering the circumstances of the individual council. Travelling times should be considered (for travelling to meetings in addition to travelling to see electors within the ward) in addition to the need to have wards that reflect natural communities.

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?

There is certainly some sense in having a cap but that should reflect the area of the individual council.

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

No. The nature of wards is so varied, even within individual councils. As a result, it is not sensible to do so. It is quite appropriate to have a range for the purposes of the Boundary Commission but the Commission must have the freedom to make exceptions if the nature of a natural community means that it would not be sensible to link it with another area.

On a related point, it is recommended that multi-member wards should be avoided since having one member per ward is simpler for residents and councillors.

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

They should be the main considerations and they should be very influential. If councils are to reflect the characteristics of their areas, all the characteristics of the area (population, travelling distances, the nature of natural communities etc) should influence the decision.

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?

Agree that there is no need for a corresponding English name for wards that have familiar Welsh names.