

SUBJECT:	PROPOSED REDUCTION IN THE SIZE OF THE BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
MEETING:	Individual Cabinet Member Report
DATE:	28 June 2017
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	All Wards in Brecon Beacons National Park

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To respond to Welsh Government's consultation on the proposal to reduce the size of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority from 24 members to 18 and reduce Monmouthshire's representation from 2 to 1 member.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 To respond to the consultation to oppose the proposed reduction in Monmouthshire members as set out in Appendix 1.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 Welsh Government is consulting on a proposal to reduce the size of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority to 18 members, bringing it into line with the Snowdonia and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities.
- 3.2 The proposal arise from a request from the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority to the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs that the Welsh Government "*...reduce the membership of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority board from 24 to 18 while also retaining representation from all 7 current unitary authorities*".
- 3.3 The National Park Authority feels that with 18 members the committee structure could be reviewed to achieve a leaner decision making structure that would make more effective use of member and officer time, as well as making further savings in member travel and subsistence. More details of the case for change can be found in the consultation paper.
- 3.4 The proposal is to reduce the membership of the Authority from 24 members to 18. This will mean reducing the number of Local Authority members from 16 to 12, including reducing the Monmouthshire representation from 2 members to 1, as set out in the table below, and reducing the number appointed by Welsh Ministers from 8 to 6 (so maintaining the existing 1/3rd Welsh Government appointees, 2/3rd Local Authority members ratio).

Proposed reduction of local authority members

Name of Council	Current	Proposed	Change
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	1	1	-
Carmarthenshire County Council	2	1	-1
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	1	1	-
Monmouthshire County Council	2	1	-1
Powys Council	8	6	-2
Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council	1	1	-
Torfaen County Borough Council	1	1	-
Total	16	12	-4

- 3.5 Whilst the desire to streamline and achieve a leaner governance structure is understood and there is no objection in principle to such a measure, the proposed distribution of members would result in clearly unbalanced representation across the seven principal authorities. As proposed the authorities represented by 1 member on the new Board would vary from 21% of the National Park's population (Monmouthshire) to 0.1% (both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen).
- 3.6 This would mean one member per approximately 6,800 population in Monmouthshire, compared to 1 per approximately 3,800 in Powys and much lower figures (as low as approximately 30) in the other principal authorities. This is clearly unbalanced and fails to adequately represent the Monmouthshire communities, which include Gilwern the second largest settlement in the National Park. If Monmouthshire retained 2 members the representation would be at a similar level across Powys and Monmouthshire.
- 3.7 It is therefore recommended that the proposed reduction in Monmouthshire be opposed as set out in more detail in Appendix 1.

4. REASONS:

- 4.1 To provide an appropriate response to Welsh Government by the deadline of 29 June 2017 and to ensure that the interests of Monmouthshire communities are adequately reflected in the governance of the Brecon Beacons National Park.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications from these proposals as the expenses of members in their capacity as members of the National Park Authority are met by that Authority.

6. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)

- 6.1 A Future Generations Evaluation is attached. This includes Equalities and Sustainability Impact Assessments (attached as Appendix 2).

7. CONSULTEES:

7.1 Cabinet members, SLT and Head of Tourism, Leisure, Culture & Youth.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

8.1 Proposed response to consultation (Appendix 1)

8.2 Welsh Government Consultation Paper

<https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/proposed-reduction-membership-brecon-beacons-national-park-authority>

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Appendix 1

Consultation Response Form

Monmouthshire County Council

What do you think?

Question 1: What are your views on the proposal to reduce the membership of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority from 24 to 18?

The County Council does not oppose the principle of a reduction in the membership of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority however it is firmly of the view that the consequences of the reduction to 18 members as proposed do not sufficiently represent the interests of the Monmouthshire communities in the National Park on the proposed Board and the Council is therefore unable to support them.

Question 2: What are your views on the proposed distribution of members of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority between the seven principal authorities and the Welsh Ministers as set out in Table 3?

The County Council opposes the proposed distribution of members as it would result in a clearly unbalanced representation across the seven principal authorities. Based on the publically available informationⁱ the distribution of area and population between the authorities is as follows:

Authority	% Area	% Pop	Membership Proposed
Powys	66.1	70	6
Carmarthenshire	16.7	5	1
Monmouthshire	11.1	21	1
Rhondda Cynon Taff	3.9	3	1
Merthyr Tydfil	1.8	1	1
Blaenau Gwent	0.2	0.1	1
Torfaen	0.1	0.1	1

The County Council questions the case for change which states that “*broadly respecting the existing ratio in terms of the area of the principal council which falls within the Park*” as the figures above illustrate that will not be the case.

Moreover the Council is of the view that population is a much more appropriate measure reflecting the role of the appointees to represent the

interests of the population of the Park. We recognise that the Local Authority appointee's role is not only to represent the communities in the local authority area that appointed them but also to represent the interests of the population of the Park as a whole. However there still needs to be a basic equity of representation across the Park's communities and local representatives who fully understand and can engage with those local communities.

As proposed the authorities represented by 1 member on the new Board would vary from 21% of the National Park's population (Monmouthshire) to 0.1% (both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen).

Based on the 2001 Census figure of 32,654 total population for the National Park that means the population per Board member would be as follows:

Authority	Members Proposed	Approximate population per member
Powys	6	3810
Carmarthenshire	1	1633
Monmouthshire	1	6857
Rhondda Cynon Taff	1	980
Merthyr Tydfil	1	327
Blaenau Gwent	1	33
Torfaen	1	33

This is clearly unbalanced and fails to adequately represent the Monmouthshire communities, which include Gilwern the second largest settlement in the National Park.

If Monmouthshire retained 2 members the representation would be at a similar level across Powys and Monmouthshire. The County Council is therefore of the view that the proposed Board should retain 2 Monmouthshire members. If the desire is still to reduce overall number to 18 Welsh Government could consider departing from the 1/3rd, 2/3rd approach and reduce the directly nominated members to 5 to reflect the special circumstances of the Brecon Beacons National Park with seven principal authorities – the comparison with the other national parks needs to be considered in context, Snowdonia only covers two local authorities and Pembrokeshire Coast one authority. It may also be appropriate to consider the representation of the two local authorities who cover much smaller areas and populations, potentially either combining or rotating their membership.

Question 3: We would like to know your views on the effects that reducing the membership of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:

- i) opportunities for people to use Welsh and
- ii) on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

The Monmouthshire part of the National Park has a strong history with regards to the Welsh language, including the successful hosting of the National Eisteddfod in Abergavenny in 2016. The wards include some of the highest levels of Welsh language speakers in Monmouthshire (up to 11.7%).

Question 4: Please also explain how you believe the proposed actions could be formulated or changed so as to have:

- i) positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and
- ii) no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

The Council considers that appropriate representation for the Monmouthshire communities is essential to ensure opportunities for people to use the Welsh language are maintained.

Question 5: We have asked 2 specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here:

ⁱ <http://www.beacons-npa.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/basic-facts-about-the-brecon-beacons-national-park.pdf>