

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

MEETING: County Council

DATE: 10th May 2018

DIVISIONS/WARDS AFFECTED: All Wards

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To seek Council approval to publish and forward to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales for final consultation and approval, the draft proposals for the community and electoral arrangements in Monmouthshire.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Council receive the final proposals formulated by the working group for the Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements.
- 2.2 That Council approve publication of the final proposals for final consultation to be undertaken by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales as an independent body.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 On the 26th July 2012, Council approved the commencement of a review of the community and electoral arrangements in Monmouthshire in accordance with Section 55(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 (The Act).
- 3.2 The review requires the Council to consider proposals relating to the constitution of new communities, the abolition of existing communities and the alteration of existing communities. Section 54(1) and 55(3) of The Act require that any changes proposed appear to the principal authority and the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales (LGBCW) 'desirable in the interests of effective and convenient local government'.
- 3.3 Following approval to commence a review, Council appointed a politically balanced working group of nine county councillors tasked with the responsibility of formulating the proposals.
- 3.4 The group formulated, and consulted on, a Terms of Reference to be used in the decision making process for the review which was presented to, and approved by Council, on the 22nd November 2012. The approved Terms of Reference was published on the 1st December 2012 along with public notice of the intention to review the communities and electoral arrangements.
- 3.5 An initial consultation period commenced from the 1st December 2012 to 22nd February 2013 inviting stakeholders to submit any recommendations or representations that they consider would assist the group in the decision making process. During this period the group attended public meetings to discuss the content of the review with stakeholders.

- 3.6 In November 2013 Council approved the draft proposals for the community review for publication and to begin the consultation period on the draft proposals. All community councils were invited to open sessions with members of the working group to discuss the proposals for their community and understand further the rationale for the final proposals.
- 3.7 During the consultation period, the Williams Commission published its report into the future of local government and also consulted on proposals to overhaul community/town councils across Wales. Due to that uncertainty, it was agreed to postpone the community review until the future of local government became clear following the Assembly elections in 2017. Given the close proximity of the Assembly elections to the Council elections in 2017, no further work could be undertaken on the review as it would cause confusion as to the ward boundaries that were to be used for that election.
- 3.8 Political group leaders agreed to reconvene the review, at the request of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales, towards the end of 2017. A single member from each political group was appointed to the working group tasked with reviewing the draft proposals and representations received, as well formulating the final proposals for the authority. All community Councils were notified of the historical timeline of the review as well as provided with copies of the draft proposals at that time.
- 3.9 Given the timeframe between the consultation into the draft proposals and now, coupled with the fact that elections were held to all community & town councils in 2017, it was the intention of the group to rerun the consultation into the draft proposals to allow new members to input into the process. However, as the process for the review is prescribed in legislation in the Local Government Act 1972, any deviance from the statutory process may null and void the review requiring it to start afresh. If this were to happen, it is unlikely the review would be completed in time for the 2021 elections given the timescales required for consultation at the various stages. Additionally, as a result of changes to the community review, a review of the County Council boundaries is also required to be conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales otherwise there could be elections held on different boundaries at Community and County level.
- 3.10 Upon approval, the final proposals will be forwarded to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales for them to review and draft their own timetable for consultation into the final proposals before passing them to Welsh Government, with or without amendments, for them to pass an order for the changes to take effect. The changes will be implemented at the next election following the Welsh Government making the order.

4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 4.1 **Approve Proposals** – If the proposals are approved then the Council will have met its statutory obligation in keeping the community boundaries and electoral arrangements under review. Additionally, in approving the proposals, a number of anomalies with the current arrangements will be addressed, including the alteration of boundaries that intersect housing estates and providing parity in representation in communities with similar demographics.

- 4.2 **Reject Proposals** – If the proposals are rejected then a number of anomalies will still exist and cause confusion for residents as well as councillors. Additionally, given the timeframe between now and the next elections in 2021, if the proposals are not approved there will not be sufficient time for the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales to carry out its consultation into the final proposals for the community and complete its required work on reviewing the electoral arrangements at County level before the next election. Therefore, in rejecting the proposals the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales will have to conduct its review of County Council arrangements based on the existing community arrangements which may result in proposals from them similar to arrangements that councillors opposed in 2011.

5. REASONS:

- 5.1 The Council has a duty under the Local Government Act 1972 to keep the community boundaries and electoral arrangements in its area under review.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No significant resource implications are anticipated and will be absorbed within existing budget.

7. CONSULTEES

All Town and Community Councils
All Town and Community Councillors
All County Councillors
Residents of Monmouthshire
Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales

Responses received from consultees have been included in the proposals report attached.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Monmouthshire County Council – Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements – Terms of Reference – November 2012

Monmouthshire County Council – Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements – Draft Proposals – November 2013

9. AUTHOR:

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