

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

SUBJECT: ELECTORAL REVIEW – COUNCIL PROPOSED SCHEME MEETING: COUNTY COUNCIL DATE: 16TH JULY 2020 DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: COUNTYWIDE
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1. PURPOSE:

To seek approval for the Council's preferred option for submission as part of the consultation being undertaken by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales ("the Commission").

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That members approve the proposed scheme attached at appendix 1 to be submitted to the Commission as a formal proposal for their consideration into the future electoral arrangements for Monmouthshire.

3. BACKGROUND:

3.1 Section 21(3) of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 provides that the Commission in carrying out its duties must seek to ensure effective and convenient local government. This is the paramount and primary function of the Commission and one of the duties provided for by the Act is the conduct of reviews of the electoral arrangements of principal areas.

3.2 Section 29 of the Act puts a duty upon the Commission to review the electoral arrangements for each principal area including:

- The total number of councillors to be elected to the council
- The number and boundaries of the electoral wards
- The number of councillors to be elected for each electoral ward in the principal area, and
- The name of any electoral ward

3.3 Section 30 of the Act requires the Commission to:

(a) seek to ensure that the ratio of local government electors to the number of members of the council to be elected is, as nearly as may be, the same in every electoral ward of the principal area; and

(b) have regard to:

- (i) the desirability of fixing boundaries for electoral wards which are and will remain easily identifiable; and
- (ii) the desirability of not breaking local ties when fixing boundaries for electoral wards.

3.4 On the 23 June 2016, Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government required the Commission to complete electoral reviews for all 22 local authorities ahead of the scheduled

ordinary council elections in 2022. As a result of concluding the community boundary review, Monmouthshire County Council was the last authority in the review programme to commence the electoral review.

- 3.5 The Commission formally commenced its statutory consultation period on the 7th July 2020 welcoming representation from stakeholders as to how the future electoral arrangements in Monmouthshire may look. This consultation runs until 28th September 2020. Following this, the Commission will look to prepare a draft electoral scheme and put this out for consultation once prepared.
- 3.6 Any individual member or political group is able to respond to the Commission independently and in addition to the Council response. The attached scheme takes account of the County area as a whole so individual members or groups who have different views for their own individual wards are able to submit their own views independently.

4. KEY ISSUES:

- 4.1 The Commission will formally be commencing their electoral review on the 7th July 2020. In line with their policy and practice document, the Commission held a briefing session with group leaders and officers on the 13th January 2020 and a seminar for all County Councillors and Community/Town Councils on the 16th January 2020.
- 4.2 In considering an electoral review for an area, the Commission have to give consideration to their Council Size Policy document which states that Monmouthshire should have 46 Councillors based on the current electorate and ideal councillor:elector ratio.
- 4.3 In considering the arrangements the Commission also need to give due regard to the forecasted five year electorate figures and the impact this will have on the level of representation at ward level. When taking this into consideration, the working group propose a scheme that returns 47 elected members within the criteria set by the Commission and provides for single member wards in as many wards as possible.
- 4.4 In considering the electoral wards, the Commission are required to use the community ward boundaries as the building blocks for the new county seats. County wards must contain a whole community ward within it and cannot draw new boundaries that differ to the community ward boundaries. The Commission can however make consequential changes to the community boundaries following an electoral review where it considers is appropriate.
- 4.5 The Commission are required to use the community boundaries that are in effect at the time of the commencement of the electoral review. The community boundary review agreed by this Council and the Commission is currently awaiting Welsh Government to create an order for those changes to take effect. The consultation sought views on whether the Commission should use the current arrangements, or the impending proposed community boundaries with the result being that the

Commission will use the proposed community boundaries to draft their electoral scheme.

- 4.6 In arriving at the attached proposed council scheme, a member from each political group represented on the Council was appointed to a working group tasked with formulating a proposed scheme on behalf of their group and one that sits within the criteria set out by the Commission. The proposals have been put forward by councillors and ensures that the proposals remain politically neutral.
- 4.7 County Councillors received sight of the proposed scheme in March 2020 for consideration and opportunity to feedback views to the working group. Seminars were also held on the 7th July 2020 and 13th July 2020 for members to discuss the proposals and understand the implications further, as well as one to one sessions to discuss their wards in more detail.
- 4.8 Due to the extent of the changes to the current electoral arrangements as a result of the community review, it is not possible to detail every change and this scheme should be read in conjunction with the approved community boundary review to understand fully the position of the boundary. The new community boundaries are available on the Councils intranet for members to review at property level if required.
- 4.9 In considering the current wards against the criteria however, a number of wards sit outside the criteria for the electoral review based on current and/or projected electorates. These wards are Govilon, Mitchel Troy, Usk, Portskewett, Chepstow Castle and Llanbadoc. Proposed resolutions to these wards are contained in the attached scheme which would result in wards falling within the Commissions criteria.
- 4.10 The working group also devised a number of options for the proposed electoral arrangements in Chepstow and sought local member feedback as to the preferred option. In consulting the members, no consensus was reached on the preferred option and therefore the working group propose the option that returns the most single member wards for the area which is in-line with the general consensus amongst members, as well as the Commissions criteria, that single member wards should be retained where possible.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Approve the scheme

In approving this Council wide scheme the Council ensure that they are submitting a council wide scheme to the Commission for them to consider in preparing the arrangements for Monmouthshire. In submitting a scheme to the Commission the Council ensure they have made clear to the Commission their desires into the future electoral arrangements for the area.

Even if a council wide scheme is approved, individual members and political groups are able to submit their own representations to the Commission should they wish to give a different perspective on certain areas.

Do not approve the scheme

If Council do not consider they are in a position to approve this county wide scheme then the Council will not collectively be submitting representation to the Commission for their consideration and will not be making clear to the Commission a view that is desirable for the future electoral arrangements of the area. As above, if no county wide scheme is agreed, then individual members and political groups are encouraged to submit their own representations for the Commission to consider.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

There are no financial implications resulting from the proposal, although any agreed increase in the number of Elected Members would require funding at the rates determined by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, for which the cost implication may require senior roles.

7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:

The electoral review will aim to ensure that as near as practicable, each vote cast at a County Council election carries the same weight and ensure electors have an equitable level of representation on the Council.

8. SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS:

All elected members will be required to undertake the necessary safeguarding and corporate parenting training necessary to their role within the Council.

9. CONSULTEES:

All elected councillors

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- The Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013
- Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales – Electoral Reviews: Policy and Practice 2016
- Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government – Written Statement – 23 June 2016
- Monmouthshire Community Boundary Review – Final Recommendations – Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales – 31st January 2019

11. AUTHOR:

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