

MEETING	THE COUNCIL
DATE	21, JANUARY, 2010
SUBJECT	REVIEW OF ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES.
PURPOSE	TO SUBMIT FOR THE COUNCIL'S APPROVAL INITIAL COMMENTS ON THE REVIEW.
AUTHOR	DILYS PHILLIPS, HEAD OF DEMOCRACY AND LEGAL.
PORTFOLIO HOLDER	COUNCILLOR DYFED EDWARDS, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL.

1. A review of electoral arrangements for the County of Gwynedd was commenced on the 9th November, 2009 with a presentation by the Boundaries Commission to all Council members. The Council's comments were sought before the Commission proceeds to formulate draft recommendations. The purpose of this report is to present the Council's initial comments.
2. A questionnaire was sent to all Council members and 25 responses were received. The Leaders of the Political Groups met to consider the responses and to formulate initial comments.
3. The initial comments are appended to this report. It can be seen that they concentrate on principles and criteria rather than the details of any particular boundaries.

RECOMMENDATION.

4. The Council is asked to approve the attached comments for submission to the Boundaries Commission.

A REVIEW OF THE ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE COUNTY OF GWYNEDD.

Initial Comments by Gwynedd Council.

1. We wish to thank Members of the Commission for their presentation to Council members on the 9th November, 2009 and the invitation to submit comments before the Commission proceeds to formulate draft proposals for Gwynedd. These comments are based on the principles or criteria we would wish the Commission to take into account in formulating their proposals.
2. The Council accepts that the number of members can be reduced without having an undue adverse effect on the work of the Council. It is the Council's view that 65 members are needed in order to fulfil its functions effectively. These would give a ratio of one member to every 1,330 elector on average.
3. Within this general ratio it is fair that there should be a variation between electoral divisions, depending on various qualitative issues. The requirements vary according to the profile of the electoral division, its population, its geographical size and its nature (e.g. there is a substantial difference between the demands within an urban area and the demands in a rural area). Whilst it is fair to place some emphasis on "the value of the vote" the Commission also needs to acknowledge the need to vary the ratio according to the demands of the area and the requirements of effective and convenient local government.
4. The expectations of elected members are greater these days with the workload being heavier than in the past. There is huge emphasis in leading the community and on representing the Council on various partnerships and outside organisations. A member is often torn between the duty towards the electoral division and the governance function within the Council. Despite this, the post is acknowledged only as a part-time one. In reality any reduction in the number of members will increase the workload on councillors and will lead to the need to make the job of councillor a full-time one with appropriate financial recompense attached. In setting the number of members therefore, it is necessary to consider the ability to fulfil all the different duties.
5. Gwynedd is a very large geographical area. In the area there are 64 community councils. Since the local member is an important contact between the Council the community, the distribution of electoral divisions should reflect the principle that no councillor will have more than two community councils within the division. That is what would allow effective local government at every level.

6. Gwynedd has four electoral divisions with two members. The Council does not support increasing the number of multi-member divisions and if the present ones are retained the number of members in them should not be increased to more than two. It is the view of the Council that one member to every division provides the most convenient and effective arrangements. In areas such as Gwynedd, there is a danger that increasing the number of multi-member divisions will mean that those divisions will become so large that they will be difficult to administer, will make the work of the councillor difficult and will bring together various communities without heeding natural connections.
7. Although it is the population on the electoral register that is the basis for the ratio member to electorate, some areas within the county have a high number of people who have not registered. This is either because local people have not registered or because the population is substantially higher at certain times of the year because of second homes, etc. The Council is of the opinion that it is fair to take this extra population into account by varying the member-elect ratio in those divisions which are affected most.
8. In establishing boundaries, the Council agrees that it is desirable to set boundaries which are easy to identify and which respect local ties. The Council would wish the Commission to take two principles into account in setting boundaries - firstly that the historical areas of Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd should be retained unless there is a sound case for deviating from them. Secondly, that consideration should be given to secondary school catchment areas and divisions should not be created which would cross the boundaries between catchment areas.
9. Lastly, the Council has just adopted an Unitary Development Plan which anticipates the development needs over the period of the review. The Commission is asked to give due attention to the plan in setting boundaries so that any new divisions will remain fit for purpose until the next review.
10. We trust that the Commission will give full consideration to the principles and criteria in these comments in formulating the draft proposals for Gwynedd.