

Comisiwn Ffiniau a
Democratiaeth Leol
Cymru



Local Democracy and
Boundary Commission
For Wales

Electoral Reviews: Council Size Policy

October 2016

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales is required to carry out periodic reviews of the electoral arrangements of principal areas in Wales. The way the Commission conducts an electoral review is defined by legislation, our *Electoral Reviews: Policy and Practice* document and by Directions that may be issued by Welsh Ministers.
- 1.2 The Commission published its original *Electoral Reviews: policy and practice* document on 12 March 2012. That document did not include the Commission's approach to council size. Accordingly, in May 2012, we produced a consultation paper setting out a preliminary view of how council size may be determined as a precursor to an electoral review.
- 1.3 At the end of the initial consultation period we had received responses from the majority of principal councils, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), political parties and individuals, including former councillors. The general response was in favour of an approach based on the identification of the number of councillors that would be appropriate to ensure the provision of effective and convenient local government for councils. The specific methodology proposed by the paper was, however, not generally supported. It was clear that there were some concerns about the suggested banding approach. The view was expressed that the methodology used and justification for establishing council sizes should be based upon wider factors than socio-geographical characteristics alone, and may need to include population density factors. There was also the view that the ratios of elector per councillor adopted in the consultation paper need to be justified.
- 1.4 Representatives of the Commission met with representatives of the WLGA in July 2012 to discuss the outcome of the consultation. At the meeting it was agreed that the Commission would work with the Local Government Data Unit ~ Wales to consider further the methodology used for determining council size and to investigate alternative data sets and methodologies. Further meetings were held with the WLGA and the Data Unit and, following detailed analysis work by the Data Unit, the Commission were able to consider alternative methodologies that utilised data that was both current and readily available. We considered methodologies which variously took account of electorate numbers, population size and measures of population density and urbanisation. We have arrived at a preferred methodology that is broadly based on the method in place in Scotland at the time.
- 1.5 The preferred methodology was published as a consultation paper on 27 March 2013. We received responses from over half of the principal councils, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), two political parties and individuals. The general response was in favour of the methodology and that it was appropriate to ensure the provision of effective and convenient local government for councils.
- 1.6 In light of the restarted electoral review programme and policy and practice the Commission has updated the policy reflecting the latest Office for National Statistics data.

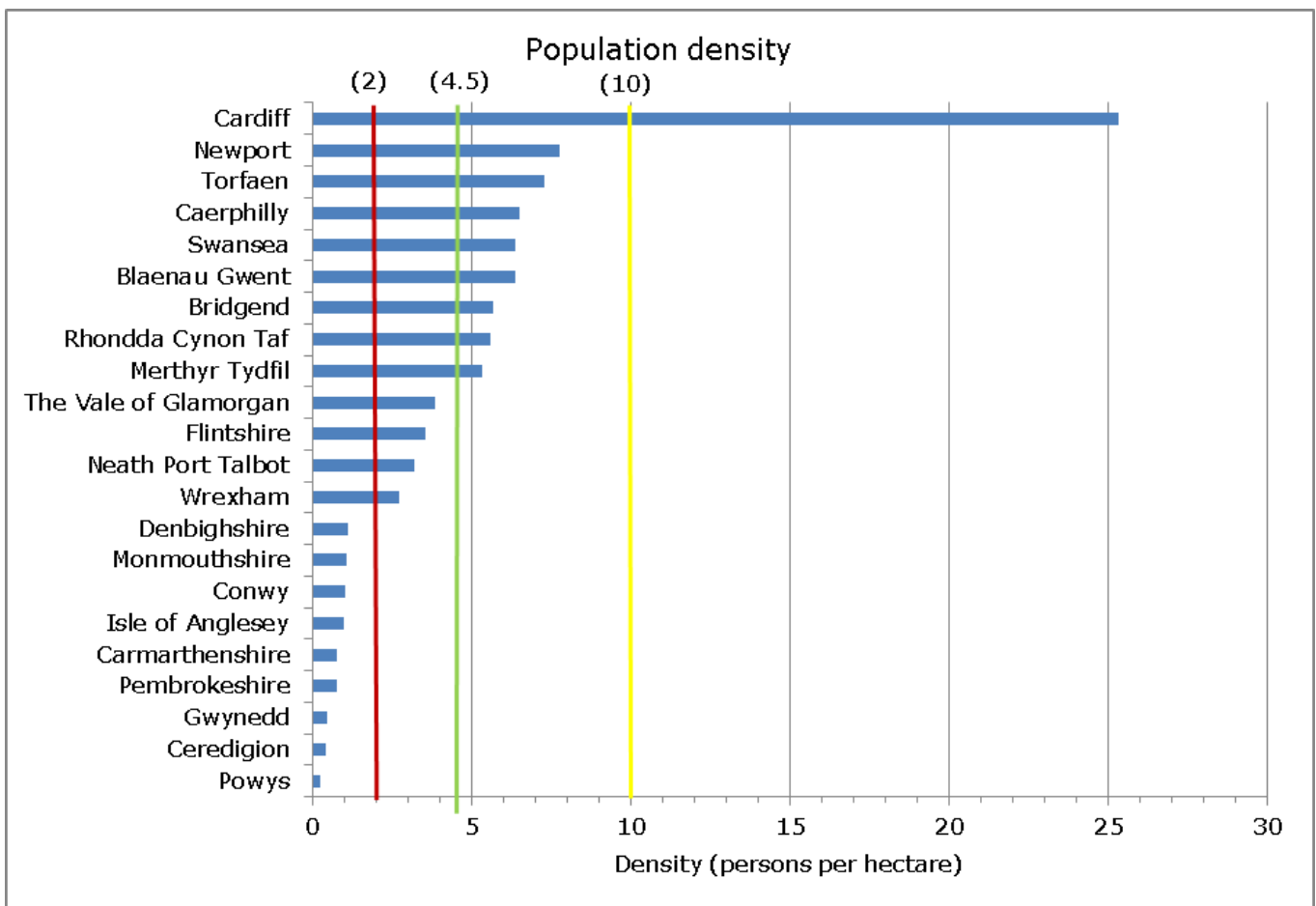
2. Council Size Methodology

- 2.1 In considering a methodology for determining the size of councils the Commission has adopted the principle that the modelling of councillor numbers should be objective, transparent and underpinned by a robust methodology. In arriving at a preferred methodology the Commission took account of the method that was in place in Scotland at their fourth general review which has been an accepted and tested approach to adjudicating council size on Local Authorities with variations of geography, topography and population distribution. The Commission and the Data Unit have worked with the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland to better understand how their approach was developed and, as a result, a comparable model for Wales has been produced.
- 2.2 The methodology in our policy uses information relating to the population distribution within councils enabling a conclusion to be drawn on the relative urban and / or rural nature of their areas, in demographic terms. Using the data to then categorise the councils enables a transparent and robust approach which will provide a sustainable method for future allocation. It ensures that councils with similar characteristics are being treated in the same way. The parameters used to determine the categories are urbanisation (percentage of the population living outside of settlements with a population of more than 10,000) and population density (number of persons per hectare). The categories have been determined by a combination of looking at appropriate groupings in the data and as determined by appropriate patterns of population distribution within principal council areas.
- 2.3 The Commission considered using other factors in the model in addition to those described above. During the consultative process the Commission has received suggestions that deprivation be a consideration in council sizing policy. It was concluded that such an element would increase complexity at the expense of transparency. A methodology based on demographic distribution is the basis of the approach we consider most appropriate for Wales.

Population Density

2.4 The first factor considered is population density. The chart below shows the distribution across Wales of the population density. The data used is the 2015 Mid Year Estimates¹ of population and the associated 2015 population densities. The data continues to suggest that there are four groups of principal councils in Wales in terms of population density (from top to bottom):

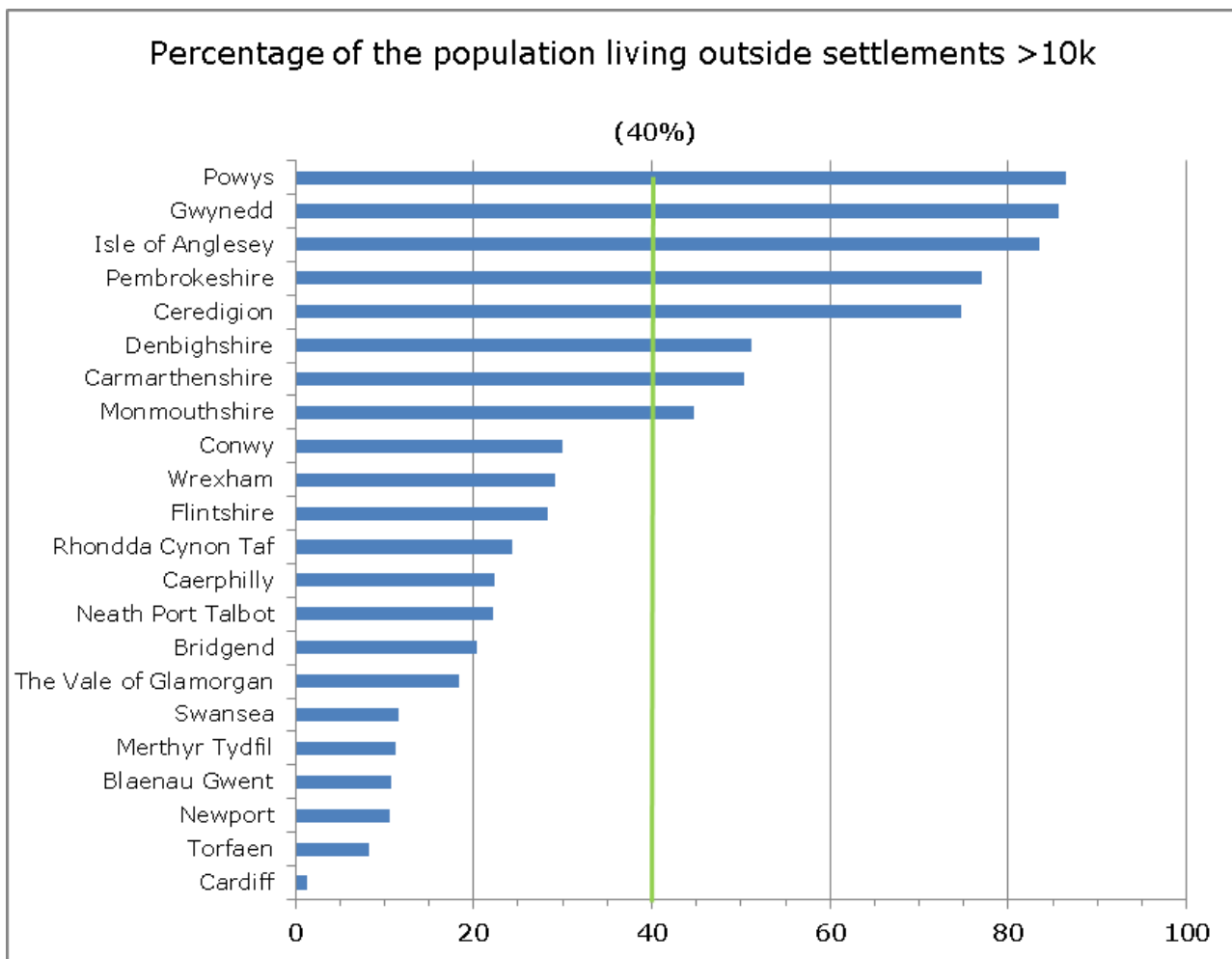
- i. Those greater than or equal to 10 (Cardiff);
- ii. Those greater than or equal to 4.5 but less than 10 (Newport to Merthyr Tydfil);
- iii. Those greater than or equal to 2 but less than 4.5 (The Vale of Glamorgan to Wrexham); and,
- iv. Those less than 2 (Denbighshire to Powys)



2.5 The Commission is therefore content to continue using the factors as set out in our Council Size Policy of 2013.

Urbanisation

- 2.6 It was considered that the Commission could divide Wales' principal councils by the four categories identified purely on the population density. However, the Commission believes that there is merit in establishing a robust model which reflects both population density and the dispersal of population within a local authority area and can continue and adapt to changes to Wales' principal councils population changes in the future. Thus, the model includes both sets of factors even though, in this first instance, it does not impact on a number of principal councils.
- 2.7 The second factor we therefore considered was 'urbanisation' or the percentage of population living outside settlements with a population over 10,000. This factor distinguishes those councils that have a preponderance of population that lives in larger communities, town or urban settlements. The chart below shows the distribution across Wales of the percentage of the population living outside of settlements with a population of more than 10,000. Although there is no clear split in the data, in order to distinguish where a council's population is concentrated more in urban areas we have identified two groups, the dividing point being where 40% of the population live outside of settlements of 10,000 people.



- 2.8 When compared to the 2011 there has been some shifts in the percentage of population living outside of 10,000 persons or more settlements. There have been three principal councils with shifts over 10%: Bridgend (12.2 percentage points decrease), Conwy (11.1 percentage points decrease) and Monmouthshire (11.3 percentage points decrease).

This represents the population moving from more rural locations to more urban locations in those council areas.

- 2.9 This has one impact where a council appears above or below the 40% threshold. Conwy has moved from 41.2% to 30%, moving to within 1% of Wrexham.
- 2.10 The Commission is content that, although there has been a move of one authority below the threshold that the differential between Conwy at 30% and Monmouthshire at 44.6% is still significant and an appropriate point to place that factor in the Commission's methodology.

Summary of Model Parameters

- 2.11 To take account of the circumstances in Wales, responses to the consultations and ensuring that only significant changes in population density would change a principal council's category a set of categories of urbanisation and population density continue to be as follows:
- Where 40% or more of the population that live outside settlements larger than 10,000 persons ; and,
 - Where the population density is greater than or equal to 10 persons per hectare, is greater than or equal to 4.5 persons per hectare but less than 10 persons per hectare, is greater than or equal to 2 persons per hectare but less than 4.5 persons per hectare, is less than 2 persons per hectare.

Categorisation and Councillor Allocation

2.12 Using the values from the charts above and described at paragraph 2.11 gives the categorisation parameters shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Categorisation parameters

Category	Urban nature (% of population living outside of towns with more than 10,000 population)		Population density (persons per hectare)
1	Less than 40%	AND	Greater than or equal to 10
2	Less than 40%	AND	Greater than or equal to 4.5
3	More than 40%	AND/OR	Less than 4.5
4	More than 40%	AND	Less than 2

2.13 Using this methodology the councils are categorised as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Category allocation

Council	Category
Blaenau Gwent	2
Bridgend	2
Caerphilly	2
Cardiff	1
Carmarthenshire	4
Ceredigion	4
Conwy	3
Denbighshire	4
Flintshire	3
Gwynedd	4
Isle of Anglesey	4
Merthyr Tydfil	2
Monmouthshire	4
Neath Port Talbot	3
Newport	2
Pembrokeshire	4
Powys	4
Rhondda Cynon Taf	2
Swansea	2
The Vale of Glamorgan	3
Torfaen	2
Wrexham	3

2.14 Once the councils are allocated to a category then a ratio of councillors to population is applied to each council within the category. This approach takes account of the size of the overall population, whilst continuing to ensure that councils with similar characteristics are treated the same.

2.15 The population ratios for the categories are determined as a set and having regard for the categories determined by urbanisation and population density. A two fold change between the top and bottom categories is proposed in Wales to reflect the slightly smaller range in urbanisation and population density. The current average ratio for category 4 councils is approximately 1:2,000 and so it was considered appropriate to apply this ratio to this category. The change in ratios between categories 4 and 3 and between categories 3 and 2 is small at 500 persons per councillor. This is to reflect the gradual change in the nature of categories. There is a greater change of 1,000 between the top two categories reflecting the difference in their nature. The proposed ratios are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Councillor to population ratios

Category	Ratio (1:)
1	4,000
2	3,000
3	2,500
4	2,000

2.16 The councillor to population ratio for each category is used to determine the number of councillors as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Categorisation and councillor allocation

Category	Council	Population	Number of Councillors
1	Cardiff	357,160	89
2	Blaenau Gwent	69,544	23
	Bridgend	142,092	47
	Caerphilly	180,164	60
	Merthyr Tydfil	59,324	20
	Newport	147,769	49
	Rhondda Cynon Taf	237,411	79
	Swansea	242,382	81
	Torfaen	91,836	31
3	Conwy	116,218	46
	Flintshire	154,074	62
	Neath Port Talbot	140,992	56
	The Vale of Glamorgan	127,592	51
	Wrexham	136,647	55
4	Carmarthenshire	185,123	93
	Ceredigion	74,642	37
	Denbighshire	94,691	47
	Gwynedd	122,864	61
	Isle of Anglesey	69,979	35
	Monmouthshire	92,476	46
	Pembrokeshire	123,464	62
	Powys	132,642	66
	Wales	3,099,086	1,196

3. Constraints

- 3.1 As noted above, when considering a methodology for determining the size of councils the Commission adopted the principle that any approach to modelling councillor numbers should be objective, transparent and underpinned by a robust methodology. It is understood, however, that any method for determining council size may be constrained by legislation and Ministerial Directions and an awareness of the impact of any proposed change to the existing size of councils.
- 3.2 In respect of council size the Ministerial Directions in respect of electoral reviews have previously stated:
- (a) It is considered that a minimum number of 30 councillors is required for the proper management of the affairs of a county or a county borough council;
 - (b) It is considered that, in order to minimise the risk of a county council or a county borough council becoming unwieldy and difficult to manage, a maximum number of 75 councillors is ordinarily required for the proper management of the affairs of a county or a county borough council.

From our consultations there appears to be a general acceptance of these maxima and minima and so we have therefore accepted these as constraints to the methodology.

- 3.3 The impact that a significant change may have on the running of a council if it applied as a result of a single electoral review has also been considered. A constraint has therefore been applied so that, for each review, the number of councillors will not vary by more than 10%. At the request of the principal council concerned the Commission may consider exceeding its 10% variance limit in moving towards the size of council determined by the model, if it can be demonstrated that the solution is more conducive to effective and convenient local government
- 3.4 In order to ensure that the process is clear and fair, the constraints on maximum or minimum councillor numbers or on levels of change have been applied at the end of the process.

4. Applied Model

4.1 The councillor allocation determined by the methodology (at Section 2 above) is then subject to the constraints (at Section 3 above). Table 5 shows the existing number of councillors and gives the allocated number of councillors before and after constraints.

Table 5: Categorisation and councillor allocation before and after constraints

Category	Council	Number of councillors		
		Existing (2013)	Before constraints	After constraints
1	Cardiff	75	89	75
2	Blaenau Gwent	42	23	38
	Bridgend	54	47	49
	Caerphilly	73	60	66
	Merthyr Tydfil	33	20	30
	Newport	50	49	49
	Rhondda Cynon Taf	75	79	75
	Swansea	72	81	75
	Torfaen	44	31	40
3	Conwy	59	46	53
	Flintshire	70	62	63
	Neath Port Talbot	64	56	58
	The Vale of Glamorgan	47	51	51
	Wrexham	52	55	55
4	Carmarthenshire	74	93	75
	Ceredigion	42	37	38
	Denbighshire	47	47	47
	Gwynedd	75	61	67
	Isle of Anglesey	30	35	33
	Monmouthshire	43	46	46
	Pembrokeshire	60	62	62
	Powys	73	66	66
	Wales	1,254	1,196	1,211

4.2 The proposed methodology gives a transparent, data driven and future proof method for calculating the appropriate number of councillors in each principal council and Wales as a whole. In some councils, the councillor numbers obtained from the proposed method show significant change from their current numbers. The constraints that are subsequently applied ensure that the transition to this system is smooth and fair.

Updates

4.3 The Commission will annually update the outputs of the model shortly after Office for National Statistics' publication of new Mid Year Estimates. It will also be updated shortly after every new electoral review Order is made by Welsh Government.

Endnote

¹ The ONS Census Mid Year Estimate data sets are a consistent series of population statistics that are provided for the 30 June each year. The Census is only conducted once every 10 years and is on a different date.