

Meeting of:	COUNCIL
Date of Meeting:	17 APRIL 2024
Report Title:	REVIEW OF COMMUNITIES – TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL SIZE POLICY
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Responsible Officer:	GARY ENNIS GROUP MANAGER BUSINESS SUPPORT
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Terms of Reference for the review of town and community council arrangements, approved by Council on the 21st June 2023, noted that that there is not necessarily an ideal fixed size, but that a community council will need to be of a large enough size to make it viable as an administrative unit of local government and therefore able to support any future collaboration with the Council. • Following initial consultation, having a clear policy on the size of a community council would assist the drafting of proposals in liaison with the Member panel. • There is some evidence of democracy deficit in all of the community councils with less than 5,000 electors i.e. all but one ward were uncontested at the Local Elections in May 2022. • It is proposed to have an ideal minimum size of electorate for a community council to be in the region of 5,000 electors with an upper electorate limit in the region of 10,000 electors, and for town councils to have a minimum electorate in the region of 9,000 but with no maximum limit. • Existing community councils with smaller electorates may need to be abolished and merged with other community councils, but the intention will always be to maintain their identities within the new larger community council. This will be achieved, as far as it is practical to do so, by maintaining their boundaries as a ward in the new community council as well as considering, in

	<p>exceptional circumstances, increasing the representation of the abolished community council on the new council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community councils with an electorate in excess of the maximum electorate may be abolished to create 2 new separate community councils, but this will be achieved without splitting existing wards i.e. maintaining the existing identity of individual wards from the original council. • In setting the ratio of councillors to electors, it is proposed to use the Aston Business School guidelines published in 1992 to provide a level of flexibility when determining the ratios. • Once approved, the draft proposals for the new town and community council arrangements from May 2027 will go out for consultation. Following a period of analysis of representations received from the consultation, which will be shared with the Member panel, a report on the final proposals will be brought back to full Council.
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider a town and community council size policy to assist with the review of town and community councils currently underway.

2. Background

- 2.1 At the Council meeting on the 21st June 2023, the Council approved the Terms of Reference for a review of community arrangements of all town and community councils in the Bridgend Council area.
- 2.2 An initial consultation exercise has been undertaken and a Member panel has met to consider all the responses to the consultation and look at options for changing boundaries, creating, abolishing and/or amending the current town and community council areas.
- 2.3 To assist the deliberations of the Member panel it is necessary for Council to approve a town and community council size policy.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 Under the current structure there are four town councils and sixteen community councils. The last review of town and community councils did not consider minimum or maximum electorate levels and only made minor amendments to the existing structure at that time.

- 3.2 The Terms of Reference for the current review approved by Council on the 21st June 2023, noted that there is not necessarily an ideal fixed size, but that a community council will need to be of a large enough size to make it viable as an administrative unit of local government and therefore able to support any future collaboration with the Council. With Council budgets being under considerable pressure for the foreseeable future, the role of town and community councils is likely to become more important in delivering local services in this collaborative approach and therefore having a clear policy on the size of a community council would assist the current review.
- 3.3 In general, larger community councils can have substantial staff teams and budgets and are better placed to manage parks and open spaces, footpaths, and community facilities as well as cemeteries and other local amenities. Smaller ones do not have this capacity, therefore in order to raise sufficient funds from their precepts to maximise economies of scale and have a collaborative approach with the Council, it may be beneficial to set an approximate electorate size. This will mean that smaller community councils may need to be merged with others to create larger community councils but not so large that they become much bigger than our town councils. There will always be flexibility here, and maintaining the identity of such communities is clearly important as is making sure they maintain an appropriate level of representation within the larger community council. Having a smaller number of larger community councils alongside town councils will maintain an effective and convenient tier of local government i.e. they are of a size that is viable as an administrative unit of local government.
- 3.4 At the Local Government elections in May 2022, of the sixteen community councils nine had an electorate of under 5,000 electors and, apart from one ward, all were uncontested; see Table 1 below. This is an indication of a democratic deficit in that there is a potential lack of democracy when seats are uncontested.

Table 1 – Community Councils under 5,000 electorate at May 2022 Local Elections

Community Council	Electorate	Seats	May 2022 Election Outcome
Merthyr Mawr	234	7	Uncontested
Llangynwyd Lower	381	7	Uncontested
Coychurch Higher	718	7	Uncontested
Coychurch Lower	1120	7	Uncontested
Cefn Cribwr	1187	10	Uncontested
Llangynwyd Middle	2321	12	Uncontested
Ynysawdre	2749	10	Uncontested
Newcastle Higher	3368	12	Aberkenfig ward Uncontested
St Brides Minor	4950	13	Uncontested

- 3.5 It is proposed, therefore, to have an ideal minimum size of electorate for a community council to be in the region of 5,000 electors with an upper electorate limit in the region of 10,000 electors, and for town councils to have a minimum electorate in the region of 9,000 but with no maximum limit.
- 3.6 Existing community councils with smaller electorates may need to be abolished and merged with other community councils but, as mentioned above, the intention will always be to maintain their identities within the new larger community council. This

will be achieved, as far as it is practical to do so, by maintaining their boundaries as a ward in the new community council as well as considering, in exceptional circumstances, increasing the representation of the abolished community council on the new council, albeit the councillor to elector ratio would be much lower than other wards on the new council. Each case would need to be assessed on its merits and in the interest of democracy. Where a community council have an electorate in excess of the maximum electorate, there may be a need to abolish the existing community council and create 2 new separate community councils, but this will be achieved without splitting existing wards i.e. maintaining the existing identity of individual wards from the original council.

- 3.7 In setting the ratio of councillors to electors, it is proposed to use the Aston Business School guidelines published in 1992 to provide a level of flexibility when determining the ratios. Their guidance is set out below in Table 2: -

Table 2 – Ratio of Councillors to Electors

Electorate	Councillor Allocation
Less than 500	5 – 8
501 – 2,500	6 – 12
2,501 – 10,000	9 – 16
10,001 – 20,000	13 – 27
Greater than 20,000	13 - 31

- 3.8 Warding of town and community councils will continue to be appropriate. Where they are warded, there will need to be parity in the ratio of councillors to electors amongst the wards in each town and community council albeit some flexibility may be required where mergers have taken place. This will ensure appropriate representation of abolished smaller communities councils in the new council.
- 3.9 Once the town and community size policy is approved, the draft proposals for the new town and community council arrangements from May 2027 will go out for consultation. Following a period of analysis of representations received from the consultation, which will be shared with the Member panel, a report on the final proposals will be brought back to full council.
- 4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**
- 4.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.
- 5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**
- 5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.
- 6. Climate Change Implications**

6.1 There are no climate change implications from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no Safeguarding and Corporate Parent implications from this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial impacts from this report.

9. Recommendation

9.1 Council is asked to approve the town and community council size policy set out in this report which will form the baseline for drafting the proposed town and community council structure to go out for consultation.

Background documents

None