



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL

CABINET

2 October 2024

Report of the Chief Executive

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All

Consultation on 2026 Review of Senedd constituencies (Initial Proposals)

Purpose of the Report

To note the submission of a response to the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru consultation on the 2026 Review of Senedd constituencies (initial proposals).

Background

The Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru is responsible for reviewing Senedd constituency boundaries in Wales.

In September 2023, the Welsh Government announced a bill to amend the current Senedd constituencies. The Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill was introduced on 18 September 2023 receiving royal assent on 24 June 2024.

Because of the new legislation, the Commission is required to create 16 new Senedd constituencies by combining two contiguous UK Parliamentary constituencies.

Each constituency will be represented by six Members of the Senedd, bringing the total number of members to 96.

This review must be completed by 1 April 2025, and will use the 32 new Parliamentary constituencies in order to create the 16 new Senedd constituencies.

The recommendations put forward by the Commission on completion of the review will be implemented directly via the 'automaticity' rule. As such, the recommendations will not require Senedd approval. The final decisions must be implemented as set out in the Commission's final report.

Initial Proposals

The Commission published its initial proposals on 3 September, 2024. Members of the public, groups and organisations have until 30 September 2024 to submit any written responses.

As part of the review the Commission will look carefully at all representations it receives to see if the initial proposals can be amended or improved. However, it is important to note that the Commission will have to balance the issues raised in representations against all other factors, as well as the constraints set out in the legislation.

Statutory Factors

Schedule 2 of the act specifies a number of specific factors that the Commission may take into account as it develops proposals and recommendations for Senedd constituencies. Specifically, the Commission may consider:

- Local government boundaries that existed on the review date.
- Special geographical considerations, including in particular, the size, shape and accessibility of a proposed Senedd constituency.
- Any local ties that would be broken by the proposed pairings.

Local Government Boundaries

The Commission defines local government boundaries in Wales as the boundaries of counties, county boroughs, electoral wards, communities and community wards. However, for the purposes of the 2026 Review the Commission is only concerned with the existing UK parliamentary constituencies.

Special Geographical Considerations

In terms of special geographical considerations that may impact on the Senedd constituency boundaries the Commission believes this will primarily relate to physical geography – such as mountains, hills, lakes, rivers, estuaries and islands – rather than human or social geography.

Matters of culture, history, socioeconomics and other possible aspects of non-physical geography (such as road links) are more likely to arise as issues when considering the separate factor of local ties.

Local Ties

With regard to local ties the Commission considers that existing boundaries are likely to have been created in recognition of local ties, and are therefore likely to reflect local ties.

The Commission's policy is therefore not to divide existing communities when it develops proposals and recommendations for Senedd constituencies, unless there is no other available solution that would enable compliance with the statutory electorate range.

However, for the purposes of the 2026 Review the Commission will only be able to consider the existing UK parliamentary constituencies.

It also has to be noted that the Commission is an independent and impartial body. As such, existing voting patterns and the prospective fortunes of political candidates do not enter its considerations during a review.

Boundary Naming

In making its proposals and recommendations, the act also requires the Commission to specify a name and designation for each proposed constituency.

Each constituency in Wales must have a single monolingual name, unless the Commission consider doing so would be unacceptable in which case they must propose different names in both Welsh and English.

Designating

Under the new act each constituency must be designated as either a 'county constituency' or a 'borough constituency'. The Commission considers that, as a general principle, where constituencies contain more than a small rural element, they should normally be designated as county constituencies. In other cases, they should be designated as borough constituencies.

The Initial Proposals

Brecon, Radnor, Neath and Swansea East

The commission proposes that a county constituency be created by combining the:

- Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe UK Parliamentary constituency and the:
- Neath and Swansea East UK Parliamentary constituency

It is the view of the Commission that there are good road links between the two areas and by pairing these Parliamentary constituencies they would be uniting areas that form part of the Neath Port Talbot principal council area into one constituency by building on the established links that exist.

The Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe constituency was one of the more contentious UK Parliamentary constituencies with many suggesting that the Cwm Tawe region should have been in a UK Parliamentary constituency with areas of Neath or Swansea.

It is the Commission's belief that the proposal would see the Cwm Tawe area combined with areas of both Neath and Swansea believing that this would create a cohesive constituency.

Electoral Ward Splits

Due to certain changes brought about by previous local Electoral Arrangement Orders the Commission also highlighted certain electoral wards that would need to be split between the proposed new Senedd constituencies. This would include:

The electoral ward of Clydach which would be split across **Brecon, Radnor, Neath and Swansea East** and the proposed constituency of **Swansea West and Gower**.

The electoral ward of Cimla and Pelenna would be split across **Brecon, Radnor, Neath and Swansea East** and the proposed constituency of **Aberafan Maesteg, Rhondda and Ogmores**.

Name of constituency

The Commission also proposed the Welsh language name of **Aberhonddu, Maesyfed, Castell-nedd a Dwyrain Abertawe** for the **Brecon, Radnor, Neath and Swansea East** constituency.

It is thought this is a suitable alternative to merely combining the UK Parliamentary constituency names would make for an unnecessarily unwieldy name.

Aberafan Maesteg, Rhondda and Ogmores

In relation to the above constituency the Commission have proposed pairing the:

- Aberafan Maesteg UK Parliamentary constituency and the:
- Rhondda and Ogmores UK Parliamentary constituency

In terms of this proposal the Commission's view was that there are good road links between the two areas and by pairing these UK Parliamentary constituencies they would be reuniting areas that form part of the Bridgend principal council area into one constituency by building on the established links that exist.

Electoral Ward Splits

Similar to the Brecon, Radnor, Neath and Swansea East constituency certain electoral ward changes brought about by previous local Electoral Arrangement Orders have been highlighted by the Commission. These include:

The electoral ward of Cimla and Pelenna which would be split across **Aberafan Maesteg, Rhondda and Ogmores** and the proposed constituency of **Brecon, Radnor, Neath and Swansea East**.

The electoral ward of Pyle, Kenfig Hill and Cefn Cribwr which would be split across **Aberafan Maesteg, Rhondda and Ogmore** and the proposed constituency of **Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend**.

Name of constituency

The Commission also proposed the Welsh language name of Aberafan Maesteg, Rhondda ac Ogwr for the **Aberafan Maesteg, Rhondda and Ogmore** constituency.

It is thought this is a suitable alternative to merely combining the UK Parliamentary constituency names would make for an unnecessarily unwieldy name.

Comments – Initial Proposals

In response to the Commission's request for comments regarding their initial proposals published on 3 September, 2024, the following 'points of principle' have been put forward for consideration.

The commentary as outlined below in relation to the proposed new Senedd constituencies was agreed by the four main political groups prior to the Commission's 30 September submission deadline and is expected to be endorsed by Cabinet at its meeting on 4 October, 2024.

The particular Senedd constituency pairings of relevance to this local authority are:

Aberafan Maesteg, Rhondda and Ogmore

Brecon, Radnor, Neath and Swansea East

Given the radical nature of the proposals, it is understood that the Commission have had an invidious task in selecting the relevant UK parliamentary constituencies to be combined.

Nevertheless, while it is acknowledged that the recommendations do allow for reunification of certain parts of the Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend principal council areas, regrettably they have also ended up creating enlarged boundaries which simply do not reflect natural community or economic ties and are not easily recognisable for local electors.

Looking first at the proposed Brecon, Radnor, Neath and Swansea East Senedd constituency.

As part of this Council's previous consultation responses to the UK Parliamentary Boundary Review it has long been argued that the communities of the Upper Amman and Swansea Valley should always have formed part of areas of Neath or Swansea and should not have formed part of the Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe constituency.

While it is clear the Commission's intention was to resolve this anomaly, the solution offered creates a larger problem with a 'super' constituency encompassing a huge area of both urban and rural communities of vastly different demographics that offers no proper sense of community ties, identity or place.

It is acknowledged that there are suitable road links along with regular public transport connections between Neath Town Centre and the Brecon area. However, if you travel further north to towns and villages in and around Builth Wells or Llandrindod Wells public transport options become far more limited. The time required to travel between such areas even by the most direct routes, excluding public transport, averages between 2-3 hours on non-motorway roads.

Coupled to the concerns around the size of the constituency, the council also felt it important to highlight the added complexity that creating new Senedd constituencies will generate.

The Commission's initial proposals, if adopted will result in significant cross-boundary overlap with neighbouring local authorities in the north and east.

This will result in electoral administrative co-ordination across three local authorities having to collaborate (excluding any additional logistic co-ordination required in other constituencies located with the principal council areas).

Turning to the proposals for the Aberafan Maesteg, Rhondda and Ogmore Senedd constituency.

As outlined in the Commission's report it is stated that good road links exist between the two areas. However, while we concur that such road links do exist we would not agree that such links are sufficiently robust.

To provide one simple example the most direct and only connecting road between Port Talbot and Treorchy would be the A4107 across the Bwlch Mountain.

This single mountain road is occasionally subject to road closures due to poor weather conditions, particularly in the winter months, and has no specific public transport connections. In terms of direct connectivity, far better links exist between Port Talbot and Bridgend with access to the M4 motorway.

In addition, while reference is made to a shared sense of character between the valley communities of Maesteg, Pontycymmer and Ogmore it is highlighted that there is little in the way of community connection between the larger community areas of Aberafan and Rhondda.

Aberafan electors tend to be more westward facing with strong links with communities in the Neath, Swansea, Bridgend and other surrounding coastal areas. Alternatively electors residing in Rhondda arguably have stronger eastward connections with communities in and around Cardiff and the Valleys.

Concluding remarks

It is the council's strong belief that the most natural combination for electors living in the Neath and Swansea East UK parliamentary constituency remains with electors residing in the Aberafan Maesteg UK parliamentary constituency.

These two constituencies form the vast majority of the Neath Port Talbot principal council area, encompassing some overlap with neighbouring authorities in the East and West and with the exclusion of the Cwm Tawe area in the north, but have started to bed down following the recent UK Parliamentary General Election in July 2024.

In the event that such a pairing proves problematic for the Commission to implement, we would offer a supplementary recommendation to combine the Aberafan Maesteg constituency with the Bridgend constituency.

The council views this combination, while not being perfect, as offering a far more appropriate pairing with communities with stronger cultural and economic ties along with much more robust transport links.

Undoubtedly, these initial proposals will result in significant confusion and misunderstanding for local electors who will no longer be able to easily identify or establish who represents them which may also diminish engagement with the democratic process.

In turn this will inevitably lead to difficulties in the administration of electoral events with overly complex multiple cross-boundary issues and the potential high risk of administrative failure in the event of any future combined electoral events where different boundary types will be in effect. We ask the Commission to take full consideration of these supplementary impacts now and during future reviews.

Overall, the Council believes that any boundary alteration proposals should be for change that is desirable, effective and convenient for local communities.

On that basis, it is felt that these initial proposals will regrettably be inconvenient for the electorate and increase the complexity and risk of administrative error in the running of elections.

In addition, members of Council have also expressed their concern over the added layers of complexity newly elected representatives will face in advocating for constituents across multiple principal councils, health boards, police forces and rescue services.

It is understood that the remit of the Commission in undertaking the current 2026 Senedd constituencies review is exceptionally restricted which may limit the ability to offer alternative combination pairings.

Nevertheless, we would question whether the voter is actually being placed at the heart of the democratic process and request that the Commission acknowledge the significant concerns over the current initial proposals.

Any future review, where greater flexibility is afforded, must give careful consideration to the current proposed constituency combinations, particularly the disconnected and detached communities in the Cwm Tawe and Ogmore areas.

The aim must be to restore the traditional community ties in these areas established over the past century but regrettably diminished by the recommendations made as part of the UK Parliamentary Review and further exacerbated by the current Senedd Constituencies Review.

Comment on naming and designations of Senedd constituencies

In relation to the naming and designation of constituencies, the Council will reserve comment until publication of the revised proposals.

Financial Impacts

Members are advised that the implementation of new Senedd boundaries could potentially require additional financial resources to enable electoral services to administer this significant change in election arrangements. These are not quantified at present and will be supported by grant funding from Welsh Government.

Integrated Impact Assessment

There are currently no direct implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Valleys Communities Impacts

There are no direct valley community impacts as a result of the recommendations set out in this report which relate to a response to a consultation only.

Workforce Impacts

There are currently no direct work force impacts as a result of the recommendations set out in this report.

Legal Impacts

There are currently no direct legal impacts as a result of the recommendations set out in this report.

Risk Management Impacts

There are no direct implications from the recommendations in this report.

Consultation

There is no requirement to externally consult in preparing the draft response to the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru's consultation exercise.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the response included at Appendix 1.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To note the response to the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru's open consultation on the 2026 Review of Senedd constituencies (initial proposals).

Implementation of Decision

In consultation with the scrutiny chairperson it is requested that the implementation be for immediate effect.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft response in relation to 2026 Review of Senedd Constituencies (Initial Proposals).

List of Background Papers

[Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru – Initial Proposals](#)

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Appendix 1

Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru

Consultation Response – Neath Port Talbot Council

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