

Neath Port Talbot CBC

Plaid Cymru Group responses to Boundary Commission Draft Proposals.

General response.

Individual members, as well as town and community councils, will be making representations directly to the Commission, but the following are a summary of the overall response.

While the Commission have considered some responses to the original discussion papers, we are concerned that there is still a disproportionate effect of reducing representation and wards in valley communities.

Several of these are to the detriment of community identities or acknowledgement of particular social and deprivation factors.

A calculation of 16/17 year olds who will be electors by 2022 are not included according to NPT electoral service calculations. Overall the proposals are premature without taking these into account as part of the threshold.

We will support individual communities that seek to maintain representation whenever possible.

We give below specific responses relating to wards represented by Plaid Cymru Councillors:-

Pontardawe & Trebanos.

Trebanos is a village in its own right with its own identity and merging the smaller village with a town will dilute the representation that it deserves.

It is already disadvantaged in several respects by being a boundary ward with neighbouring City and County of Swansea with being submerged into a larger urban area.

The consultation document considers that the proposed electoral ward shares a common identity, but that is not borne out by the view of all three county councillors representing the two wards currently, nor Pontardawe Town Council or residents whose views have been consulted.

As the current proposal will not contribute to an overall reduction in NPT CBC councillor numbers or achieve significant cost savings , it is difficult to see the purpose of enforcing a ward merger which will have negative impacts on local democracy and on residents.

The recommendation of local members is to retain two wards, and also transfer the following from Pontardawe Ward to Trebanos Ward:

Derw 27 voters on roll

Glanrhyd 11

Primrose Row 13

Swansea Road 92

Uplands 53

Western road 55

And Ynysderw House 31

To the Trebanos ward

- 282 electors in total

Bryncoch South and Dyffryn

The draft proposal is to create a two-seat ward in Dyffryn [new title]. However that would involve a significant transfer of properties from the Brookfield and Tailwyd area of Bryncoch South.

This would not form a natural boundary between Dyffryn and the settlement of Bryncoch which is currently defined by the river Clydach.

It would also cut across the boundary of Blaenhonddan Community Council.

The alternative recommendation by local members of Bryncoch South and Bryncoch North is to transfer a number of streets from Dyffryn Ward to Bryncoch South, thus respecting the natural boundary of the river Clydach and reflecting the links of the Sinnotts area with Cwrt Herbert.

This would form a three-member ward in Bryncoch South.

The streets involved would be:

Stratton Way.

The Sinnotts.

Trehearne Court.

Unnamed Cl.

Unnamed Cl.

Monk Cl.

Ryan Cl.

Pilgrims Cl.

Nidum Cl.

Parry Cl.

Friars Cl.

Benedict Cl.

Taillwyd Road.

Glynneath & Blaengwrach

Blaengwrach is a distinct and recognised community, which would be disadvantaged by being submerged within the larger area of Glynneath, as highlighted by local members.

The current draft proposals – reducing to two members in one ward- seem to be based on a misconception of stagnating electoral and property numbers.

Many developments and projects have been on hold for many years, Now that Welsh Government and Neath Port Talbot are actively encouraging the regeneration of the valley areas many of these proposed developments could now become a reality.

Electoral representation should, therefore, be increased and not decreased in the Valley communities to enhance this.

The proposed developments in the upper Neath Valley include:-

The 2020 review of the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan could change settlement areas and allow house building and employment opportunities not presently in the settlement.

The controversial Natural Resources Wales flooding predictions are now being reviewed, this may result in the removal of parts of the flood plain and will allow an increase in house and retail building in the area.

Regeneration of Glynneath Town will also increase the retail and housing development in that area.

The completion of the Heads of the Valley road A 465 will bring significant increases in the amount of road traffic in the area and open up this location for favourable developments including housing.

The new Rail Test Track at Onllwyn will bring significant numbers of contractors, employees and visitors to the Neath and Dulais valley areas which again will add to the need for more house building.

There are ongoing discussions about an Eco village being built in the Blaengwrach ward, at the now closed Selar Opencast site, again, this will mean an increase in house building and increase in the electorate in the Blaengwrach ward.

All of these developments could increase the voting population dramatically within the next few years and bring it much nearer to the recommended number of voters per ward in both Glynneath and Blaengwrach.

It is acknowledged that Blaengwrach ward includes the Glynneath West Central Town ward for electoral purposes. This arrangement is familiar locally but, if there is a need to regularise, it should be at town council rather than County Borough level.

Aberafan

The initial representations by NPT CBC recommended retaining three seats in Aberafan, and we would agree with that recommendation.

The electoral number threshold is not the only consideration here because it's an urban ward with some significant and indeed contrasting factors:-

An urban ward with consistently the highest rates of anti-social behaviour of any Ward in the County over the last decade.

Significant areas of deprivation in central residential streets, contrasting with new build in other parts of the ward.

Over 10% of the business rates for the county yet less than 0.5% of the land mass.

One of the most successful industrial parks - Baglan - than has employment for thousands.

It has the M4 and the Mainline railway running through the length of the ward.

It is probably the most successful Ward in terms of retail in the county.

Both Aberafan Shopping Centre and the major supermarket that pays more NDR than any other in the County (Morrison's)

The biggest hospital in the county is in the ward.

It has the Civic Centre including the Council Chamber in the Ward.

The caseload even with 3 Councillors is overwhelming as it is, and we would urge the Commission to reconsider its current recommendation of reducing the representation down from three to two members.

Pelenna

This is not a ward represented by Plaid Cymru but we wish to be consistent with our previous representations.

Our preference was for Pelenna to retain its status as a ward co-terminous with the community council. However, if that is not accepted it is preferable for Pelenna to be incorporated with Cimla in an acceptable combination if that is till the preference of the local community.

Cwmllyfell & Ystalyfera

Our preference would have been for Cwmllynfell to be maintained as an individual ward reflecting the local community.

If that is not possible we would support the revised proposal of combining Ystalyfera with Cwmllynfell as a two-member ward as it recognises the Swansea valley identity of both current wards. It is also more reasonable to link Lower Brynaman and Gwaun Cae Gurwen in the Aman Valley.

Other Wards

We would support the retention of other wards currently represented by Plaid Cymru councillors:

Godre'rgraig

Neath South

Rhos

Bryncoch North.

Thank you for your consideration,

Cllr. Alun Llewelyn.

Leader

Plaid Cymru Group.