



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023 - 2024

COUNCIL

24 APRIL 2024

REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR RHONDDA CYNON TAF

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of the report is to inform Members of the duty to conduct a Community Review, to present the Terms of Reference for this review and seek approval to commence the process, including the establishment of a cross-party working group.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

- 2.1 Approves the commencement of a Community Review for Rhondda Cynon Taf;
- 2.2 Notes the Council Size Policy, as set out in Appendix 2, that would be applicable to the conduct of the proposed Community Review;
- 2.3 Approves the Terms of Reference for the Community Review as set out in Appendix 3 and notes the indicative timetable set out in the report for conducting the Community Review; and
- 2.4 Establishes a cross-party working group to oversee the review, which it is proposed consist of 10 Elected Members (6 Labour, 1 Plaid, 1 RCT Independent, 1 Independent and 1 Conservative) with nominations from Group Leaders to be submitted to the Service Director, Democratic Services & Communications.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council has a duty under section 22 of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 ("the Act") to report every ten years on a community review having regard to the Local and Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales' (the 'LDBCW') timetable for conducting the reviews

of principal areas' electoral arrangements required by section 29 (1) of the Act.

- 3.2 The last electoral review for Rhondda Cynon Taf, carried out by the LDBCW, was conducted in 2021 with consequential changes being implemented for the Local Government Elections in May 2022. That review also led to some consequential changes being made to community wards, which were also implemented for the 2022 local elections.
- 3.3 Both the Commission and principal councils, when carrying out their duties, are required by the Act to seek to ensure effective and convenient local government.
- 3.4 A review of community arrangements is a legal process whereby the Council will consult with those living in the area, and other interested parties, on the most suitable ways of representing the people in the area identified in the review. This means making sure that those living in the area, and other interested groups, have a say in how their local communities are represented. A 'community' is the unit of local government that lies below the level of the principal council and, as Members are aware many, but not all, communities have an elected town or community Council. Some communities for electoral purposes are further divided into 'community wards'.
- 3.5 Any review of boundaries must reflect local identities and, as stated above, facilitate effective and convenient local government. A review offers an opportunity to put in place strong, clearly defined boundaries tied to ground features, and to remove any anomalous boundaries that exist as well as reflecting possible shifts in the population.
- 3.6 The Council completed its last full Community Review in 2014 and reviews follow a 10-year cycle. Hence a further review is now required.

4. 2024 COMMUNITY REVIEW

- 4.1 Attached at Appendix 1 to this report is the LDBCW Guidance for Principal Councils on the review of Communities, which was updated in 2022. The Commission has also prepared an Easy Read version of the Guidance which can be accessed [here](#) and a video to explain the background to Community Reviews which can be accessed [here](#).
- 4.2 Attached at Appendix 2 to this report is the Council Size Policy proposed for the conduct of the Community Review. The Council Size Policy creates a mechanism to determine, for the Community and Town Councils, the appropriate number of community councillors for a given town or community based on the electorate of the community and achieve electoral parity. Ideally it should ensure, as far as is practicable, that the number of electors per councillor is roughly the same across all community and town councils within the Council's area.

- 4.3 Attached at Appendix 3 to this report are the proposed Terms of Reference for conducting the Review. The Terms of Reference set out the proposed timetable and procedures for the review, provide guidance and set out the issues that would be considered during the review, including explanations of the Council Size Policy and grouping of communities.
- 4.4 It is proposed this review be carried out under section 25 of the Act, which covers the changes to boundaries and any consequential changes to electoral arrangements. A review of community boundaries under section 25 should ensure that communities continue to reflect local identities and facilitate effective and convenient local government. For example, over time communities may expand with new housing developments. This can lead to boundaries becoming anomalous, for example if new housing is built across boundaries resulting in confusion over which community a housing estate falls into. A community review offers an opportunity to the principal council to put in place strong, clearly defined boundaries tied to ground features, and to remove any anomalous boundaries that exist.
- 4.5 If the Council recommends boundary changes in the course of a section 25 review, it is also able to recommend changes to the community council and to electoral arrangements for the communities that are affected by the boundary changes. This can be done as part of the same section 25 review, enabling the Council to make recommendations for the electoral consequences of boundary changes.
- 4.6 Discussions with the LDBCW have taken place regarding the proposed timing of the Review to ensure they have sufficient time to make any Orders that are consequent following a community review and that it would not have an adverse impact on the work the Commission has already programmed.
- 4.7 As part of the review, the Council will have regard to the LDBCW Guidance and consider the following:
- the creation, alteration, abolition or merging of communities and community wards;
 - the name of the community and, where warded, the name of community wards;
 - Where changes have been made to the boundaries of communities or community wards the number of councillors representing the community and, where warded, the number of councillors per ward; and
 - The wards that are contested and uncontested in recent community and town council elections.
- 4.8 The first stage of the review is to ask all interested parties to consider the current community boundaries and submit their views on any changes required to create communities that provide for effective and convenient local government. All submissions will then be considered, and the Council will publish a Draft Proposals Report and will hold a consultation on those proposals. All submissions will then be considered, and Final proposals will be

submitted to the LDBCW. The LDBCW will then, if it thinks fit, give effect to these recommendations either as submitted, or with modifications via an order.

4.9 Any changes to electoral arrangements for communities will only be considered as a consequence of any changes to community boundaries.

4.10 When undertaking the review, the Council is required to undertake such steps as it thinks fit to ensure that persons who may be interested in the review are informed of the review and are informed of any draft proposals or recommendations. In addition to consulting with the wider public the Council undertakes to meet these duties by writing to:

- The LDBCW;
- The Town and Community Councils across the principal council area;
- The Senedd Members representing the area;
- The Regional Senedd Members for the area;
- The Members of UK Parliament representing the area;
- Elected Members;
- Police & Crime Commissioner;
- South Wales Fire & Rescue Authority;
- Welsh Language Commissioner;
- The Welsh Government;
- Trade Unions; and
- Ordnance Survey.

Timetable for the Review

4.11 The review is proposed to start in May 2024 with final recommendations being provisionally scheduled to be submitted in March 2025. Any changes that occur as a result of the review process would then come into effect for the next Local Government Elections in 2027:

Action	Period	Date
Start of Review – Initial Publicity		May 2024
Initial Investigations	6 Weeks	July 2024 to August 2024
Draft Proposal Publication/ Consultation	6 Weeks	November 2024 to December 2024
Final Recommendation Submission		March 2025

4.12 Whilst carrying out the review it is good practice to set up a cross-party working group to draft the Terms of Reference, consider the consultation responses and to agree any proposals. Setting up a cross-party group allows for cooperation between the political parties and can facilitate endorsement at Full Council. The Commission saw the benefits of cross-party working groups set up to work on boundary changes during its last round of electoral reviews where some principal councils had established such working groups.

- 4.13 It is therefore proposed that Council establish a cross-party working group to oversee the review, which it is proposed consist of 10 Elected Members (6 Labour, 1 Plaid, 1 RCT Independent, 1 Independent and 1 Conservative) with nominations from Group Leaders to be submitted to the Service Director, Democratic Services & Communications. The working group would consider the responses to the initial consultation, agree the draft recommendations to be presented to Full Council, consider any responses to the consultation on the draft recommendations, and agree the final recommendations to be presented to Full Council.
- 4.14 If Council chooses to accept the final recommendations of the review, concluded after public consultation, it will be necessary to submit the recommendations to the LDBCW which, following a final 6 week period for representations, will prepare an Order to implement the changes. Any changes to the arrangement of communities will take effect at the next scheduled Town and Community elections in May 2027.

5. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

- 5.1 It is recognised that the development of strong, sustainable communities depends on residents' active participation in decision making in respect of the governance arrangements of community and town councils. The Council is therefore committed to engaging effectively with the diverse communities it serves and to enabling local people to participate meaningfully in the creation of effective community governance arrangements where all people feel able to take an active part in influencing service delivery.
- 5.2 The timetable in the Terms of Reference includes key consultation periods to allow time for responses to be received, including consultation with mandatory consultees at the various stages in the process.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The publishing and administrative costs of the review will be met from existing departmental budgets.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no specific equality and diversity implications aligned to this report or the wider review at this time.

8. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Welsh Language Commissioner would be consulted in relation to the Community Review and in respect of the creation of any new community names. The WLC is responsible for advising on the standard forms of Welsh place-names. The WLC has convened a Place-names Standardisation Panel to provide recommendations and expert advice in this field.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Principal Councils have a duty to monitor the communities in its area and, where appropriate, the electoral arrangements of such communities for the purpose of considering whether to make or recommend changes. These changes are brought about by means of community boundary reviews under section 25 and community electoral reviews under section 31 of the Act.
- 9.2 Section 22 of the Act 2013 provides that a principal council must have regard to the Commission's timetable for conducting the reviews of principal area's electoral arrangements when determining when to conduct a community review.
- 9.3 Section 34 of the Act stipulates the 'mandatory consultees' for a Community Review.

10. LINKS TO THE WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 10.1 The review of community arrangements safeguards the long-term needs of local residents to ensure an effective and convenient local government and electoral equality.
- 10.2 The Council will be submitting a proposal to the Commission in line with effective collaboration and involvement between various groups and bodies.

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 The Council is required to undertake a Community Review to consider what changes, if any, are needed to existing community arrangements across the whole of the County Borough. This report sets out how the proposed review would be undertaken and seeks Council's approval to commence the review process and agree the necessary documentation.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

as amended by

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS:

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Freestanding matter