

Llantrisant & Llangwm Communities

Response of Llantrisant Fawr Community Council to the Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements

Dear Sir,

Members of Llantrisant Fawr Community Council discussed the draft Review of Community Boundaries and Electoral Arrangement at its meeting on the 9th January and have requested that I convey their opposition to the proposals as they apply to Llantrisant Fawr Community Council, namely that it be combined with Llangwm Community Council to form a new Council area.

Members are opposed to the draft proposals for the following reasons:

1. Whilst the proposal is more in line with the County Council's criteria published earlier last year, the creation of a new community council of Llantrisant & Llangwm council will half the number of elected members and therefore greatly reduce both the level of representation for rural communities and the involvement of local residents who would wish to get involved in local community affairs through work on local councils. Local democracy will suffer as a result.
2. A single Council for such a greatly increased land area will result in a loss of local focus as the interests and issues of separately local communities will naturally be different.
3. The draft proposals will not save the County Council any money or resources and it is likely that it will not result much in the way of savings for most community councils. At a time when there could be changes to local government in Wales it is unwise to make changes in the structure of this most basic tier of local government when the future of the Unitary Authorities is in question.
4. The draft proposals fail to demonstrate or give any evidence as to how the work of local councils and local democracy would be enhanced or improved by such measures. If there are no advantages then why make changes?

Members of Llantrisant Fawr Community Council urge the County Council reconsider their proposals for our community area and maintain the status quo.

Additional Comments

5. *We are concerned that the proposals allocate only one member for the Gwernesney Ward whilst at present it has three. Members do not consider this an adequate level of representation. One member wards suffer the disadvantage that if the elected member is away or absent through illness there is no other councillor available to represent the ward.*
6. *In view of the publication of the Williams Report which recommends a major reorganisation of community councils in Wales it would seem sensible to now await these new proposals rather than put Monmouthshire Community Councils through 2 successive reorganisations.*

Yours faithfully,

John Turner
Clerk,
Llantrisant Fawr Community Council

LLANGWM COMMUNITY COUNCIL

**Clerk: Mrs Carleen Martin
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7 February 2014

Dear Sirs,

Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements

My Council has directed me to write to object most strongly to the proposals relating to this Council from the Review of Communities and Electoral Arrangements.

It is the view of this Council that the proposals, if implemented, would lead to an electoral arrangement that is not fit for purpose.

This Council endorses the very sensible comments in the document from Llantrissant Fawr Community Council, repeated here:

- Whilst the council accept that there is a wide variation between levels of representation in Monmouthshire, strict levels of representation are less important than the recognition of geographical factors and natural boundaries of communities based on settlement.
- Any enlargement of the existing community would result in a loss of community focus.
- Trying to create a community with a minimum of 1,000 electors would create a community of a large number of scattered villages with different priorities and interests.
- The prime function of a community is to represent the views, interests and act on behalf of a well-defined community based on patterns of human settlement and not predefined councillor to elector ratio.
- The council believe that the current arrangements have proved effective in that it represents a small cluster of settlements with a shared sense of location and local identity. To that end they propose no change to the existing arrangements.

In addition, this Council makes the following observations regarding the proposals:

1. The Terms of Reference state (page 3) that “The review ...will aim to ensure that any proposals put forward by the Council achieve effective and convenient local government for the electors”. However:
 - a. It cannot be effective and convenient for electors to have to travel across such a wide area to attend council meetings. In an area where there is very little public transport this cannot help the sustainability agenda and will also increase costs.
 - b. It cannot be effective for councillors to be asked to represent the views of community areas within which they do not reside and have limited local knowledge
 - c. We strongly believe that there should be no change to current arrangements for the following additional reasons:-
 - We believe that there is currently little in common between our council and adjacent councils, with which a merger is proposed. This is because of localised factors which are of importance only to our respective communities.
 - We believe that current arrangements are working effectively, and the proposed changes will add nothing, whilst placing at risk the effective working arrangements we currently have.
 - d. Each of the four local communities would suffer less effective local representation, as a broader range and number of matters would necessarily have to be considered by a larger council. This would result in less focus on those very local issues that are so important to dispersed communities and which motivate local people to serve on their community councils.
 - e. It would be ineffective to have a situation in which any ward is represented by a single councillor. This is the current proposal for Llansoy ward, and we are strongly opposed to this. Llansoy village's electors would be unrepresented at any meeting that its single councillor could not attend. Furthermore local representation works best when it is possible for local discussion and debate between councillors for each ward. The proposals are clearly not effective.
2. The Terms of Reference state (page 8) that “The Council will seek to ensure that a community is created which is based on an area which reflects the identity and interests of that community.”. The existing area already matches this description, but would not do so if enlarged. The identity of the area is confirmed by the local interests within it. As well as the local churches/chapel, these include the Women’s Institute and Local History Groups which draw their support from Llangwm and Llansoy, but certainly not from Llantrissant.

3. The report makes the case that there are “a number of small single track roads that link the Llantrisant ward and the Llangwm ward”. There are actually two, numbered the 63.1 and the 63.3 when they get to Llangwm. As stated these roads are single track, however they are also steep with few passing-places. Due to the lack of maintenance by the local authority they are passable mainly by farm and 4*4 traffic only. These links are certainly not prominent as asserted and could not be used to support the merger of the two communities.
4. Although the Terms of Reference do not include a cost benefit it is worth noting that little cost saving would be achieved. No Llangwm Community Councillor draws any allowances and reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses is very limited. Travel expenses for council business beyond the council's area are also very small. We do not understand how investment of resources into these proposals at this time can be justified.

We trust that these objections will alert the Review to the problems with the proposed changes and that they will not be implemented.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carleen Martin".

Carleen Martin
Clerk

Llantrisant & Llangwm Communities

Dear Councillor Greenland,

There is great dismay in Llansoy at the news that under a new arrangement our community council is to be merged with Llantrisant and Gwernesney, and that we are to be reduced from two councillors to one.

Can you explain why the new arrangement has been decided on, and what the point of it is? I understand it will result in no financial saving. But it will reduce democracy in our area. Each community should always have at least two representatives on any council, so there is someone else to go to if there is a disagreement with one of them. In fact we are completely satisfied with our existing councillors

It seems to have been arbitrarily decided that each community council should serve a population of a thousand. This may be useful in urban areas, but it is completely unsuitable for the widely scattered rural villages of Eastern Monmouthshire, and seems no more than a pointless bureaucratic exercise. Llansoy has no connection with Llantrisant, does not border on it, cannot even see it. I can, as it happens, see your house from my own : we therefore have interests in common. But with Llantrisant we have none.

I hope it is not too late to prevent the new arrangement coming into force.

Yours sincerely

Julian Mitchell

Llantrisant & Llangwm Communities

I do not object to the proposed changes. There have been no elections to the Llangwm and Llansoy Community council for many years now, most of the members have been co-opted, and I have not felt that my interests have been represented. I do however feel that many of the Community Councillors intend to serve the community. I have found that the Monmouthshire One Stop Shops have been very helpful with local issues which concern me. For instance last year I visited the one in Chepstow to discuss the state of the lane past my house. The lane was inspected and repairs carried out in a timely manner to a good standard. Therefore I feel that county resources would be well directed to supporting these excellent facilities, which are of benefit to the residents of Monmouthshire.

Regards, Sylvia Fowles.