

REVIEW OF PART OF THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE COUNTY BOROUGH OF THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN AND BRIDGEND

REPORT AND PROPOSALS

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The Rt. Hon. Alun Michael JP MP AM
First Secretary
The National Assembly for Wales

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 We the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales (the Commission) have completed the review of part of the boundary between the County Boroughs of The Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend as directed by the Secretary of State for Wales in his directions to us dated 20th February 1998.

2. SCOPE AND OBJECT OF THE REVIEW

2.1 Section 54(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 (the 1972 Act) provides that the Commission may in consequence of a review conducted by them make proposals to the Secretary of State for effecting changes appearing to the Commission desirable in the interests of effective and convenient local government.

Secretary of State for Wales' Directions

2.2 In accordance with Section 56(1) of the 1972 Act (as substituted by the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 (the 1994 Act)) the Secretary of State for Wales has directed the Commission to conduct a review of the area comprising the Communities of Ewenny, St. Bride's Major and Wick in the County Borough of The Vale of Glamorgan.

2.3 The Secretary of State for Wales has also given the Commission the following directions for their guidance in conducting the review in accordance with Section 59(1) of the 1972 Act:

- a. discrete settlements of human habitation should, wherever possible, be situated within one principal area;
- b. boundaries between local government areas should, wherever possible, follow identifiable physical features such as rivers and roads.

Procedure

2.4 Section 60 of the 1972 Act lays down procedural guidelines which are to be followed in carrying out a review. In line with that guidance we wrote, on 29th May 1998, to The Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend County Borough Councils, Ewenny, St. Bride's Major and Wick Community Councils, the Members of Parliament for the local constituencies, the local authority associations, the police authority for the area and political parties to inform them of our intention to conduct the review, to request their preliminary views and to provide them with a copy of the Secretary of State for Wales' directions to the Commission. We invited the County Borough Councils to submit suggestions for changes to the boundary. We also publicised our intention to conduct the review in local newspapers circulating in the area and asked the Councils to display public notices.

3. DRAFT PROPOSALS

3.1 We received representations from The Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council, Bridgend County Borough Council, four community councils, two county borough councillors, three interested bodies and 64 residents. We also received three petitions.

3.2 It became apparent that from meetings with The Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend County Borough Councils and Ewenny, St. Bride's Major and Wick Community Councils together with letters received from residents that there was a groundswell of opinion that a ballot should be held to gauge the views of electors. We contracted Electoral Reform (Ballot Services) Limited to conduct a postal ballot of all electors within the Communities of Ewenny, St. Bride's Major and Wick. The ballots in each of the communities were only part of the decision making process and the results were evaluated together with other evidence received before the Commission published its draft proposals. A total of 2,825 ballot papers were issued of which 70% were returned. Of those electors who returned papers, 74% expressed a preference to remain in The Vale of Glamorgan and 26% wished to return to Bridgend.

3.3 The results of the postal ballot were:

| Community | Ballot papers issued | Number returned | %age returned | Preference for The Vale of Glamorgan | Preference for Bridgend |
|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Ewenny | 619 | 444 | 71.7% | 287 (64.6%) | 157 (35.4%) |
| St. Bride's Major | 1,640 | 1,156 | 70.5% | 868 (75.1%) | 288 (24.9%) |
| Wick | 566 | 387 | 68.3% | 315 (81.4%) | 72 (18.6%) |
| Total | 2,825 | 1,987 | 70.3% | 1,470 (74.0%) | 517 (26.0%) |

3.4 We considered the result of the ballot together with all other evidence received and the Secretary of State's directions for guidance and proposed that the existing boundary

between the County Boroughs of Bridgend and The Vale of Glamorgan should remain. Under our proposal the Communities of Ewenny, St. Bride's Major and Wick would remain within the County Borough of The Vale of Glamorgan. The boundaries of individual communities would remain unchanged.

4. SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED IN RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT PROPOSALS

4.1 Bridgend County Borough Council expressed their disappointment with the content of the draft proposals report. They noted that paragraph 5.3 of the report stated that the Commission, 'were notconvinced that distance to respective county headquarters was an indicator of convenience. Convenience of use of services will depend to a large degree on an individual's take up of centrally provided services and personal perception of convenience and satisfaction.' The Council said that clearly, Bridgend is considerably nearer to the three communities than Barry, Llantwit Major or Cowbridge and it would indeed be much easier for people to access centrally provided services.

The Council believed that Bridgend is the natural focus for the three communities and the ease and convenience of using local government services in tandem with access to all legal, health and shopping facilities could not be denied. Residents from the three communities continued to use the leisure, libraries, recycling and waste disposal facilities in Bridgend. This was seen as a clear indication that the three communities find it more convenient and efficient to use the services provided by Bridgend Council than to access those from The Vale of Glamorgan.

The Council referred to two further important points, made in their initial submission [paragraphs 15.12 and 15.13 of Appendix 1 to the Draft Proposals report refers], which the Commission appeared not to have taken into consideration.

- i. The confusion of boundaries. The electorate in the three communities is only part of the electoral process within The Vale of Glamorgan for elections to the County Borough Council and for community councils. They are represented by a different MP and MEP and will be represented by a different National assembly Member on the first past the post system and in the regional lists. The Council believed that Commission's decision to retain the existing boundary ignores the opportunity to bring these boundaries into line and to end the confusion for the three communities.
- ii. The response to emergency situations. The Council felt that in dealing with a range of emergencies, from minor incidents to major disasters, a rapid response which is clear and transparent is essential. They believed that retaining the current situation could cause serious problems. They pointed out that emergency services are located within the County Borough of Bridgend and that any local authority response would be better co-ordinated from Bridgend rather than from the Vale. Whilst the Council would assist in whatever way necessary should an emergency occur, response to an emergency incident of whatever size cannot afford to be dented through confusion over boundaries. The Council believed that this could not be guaranteed if the status quo remained.

Bridgend County Borough Council felt that it was clear that the Commission's decision was influenced greatly by the referendum, which showed that the majority were in favour of the communities remaining in The Vale of Glamorgan. The Council referred to the vociferous campaign that was conducted by the three communities to stay within Bridgend prior to the reorganisation of local government and at that time public opinion was comprehensively ignored. The turnout in public opinion did not, the Council

believed, indicate that services provided by the Vale were any better than those delivered by Bridgend but was influenced more by the residents' desire not to be moved from one authority to another yet again so soon after the boundary change made in 1996. The ballot result showed how changeable public opinion could be and whilst public opinion cannot be ignored, the Council believed that the Commission must make its decision on all the evidence put before it.

In conclusion the Council pointed out that the decision to change the boundary in 1996 was fundamentally flawed and to retain the status quo would miss the opportunity to put that flawed decision right once and for all. They said that the weight of evidence as regards effective and convenient local government clearly indicated that the natural home for the people of the three communities was the County Borough of Bridgend. The Council urged the Commission to take that right decision.

4.2 The Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council welcomed the proposals that Ewenny, Wick and St. Bride's should remain in The Vale of Glamorgan. They urged the Commission to confirm them when their final proposals are published, in line with the preference expressed by local residents.

4.3 Ewenny Community Council were still concerned about the future provision of services such as; health, police services and primary education (Oldcastle School). The council believed however that they must defer to the views of the residents of the community as expressed in the ballot.

4.4 Win Griffiths MP for Bridgend said that his own strong view was that the change [that is the transfer of the three communities from Bridgend to The Vale of Glamorgan] should never have been made and the original proposal was wrong headed. However, during the debates on the original proposal he had made it clear that he believed that there should be a further referendum for people to make up their own minds on whether they wanted to stay in the Vale or return to Bridgend. Even though the recent referendum did not have the same strong majority as the original referendum to remain in Bridgend he believed that the result should be respected and therefore no change should be made.

4.5 Ewenny and Vale Branch Labour Party were happy to accept the democratic will of the electors to remain in The Vale of Glamorgan. They noted however that no attempt had been made to secure the views of the electors in the area to the north of the River Ewenny, which was transferred to Bridgend County Borough in 1997. With that reservation the branch was content that the Commission should recommend to the Secretary of State that there should be no further change to the boundary.

4.6 Mr P W and Mrs E J Barber of St Bride's Major felt that the recommendations that the Communities should remain in the Vale reflected the view of the majority of people living in the parishes as shown by the result of the vote.

4.7 Mr and Mrs R A Green of Ewenny approved of the proposals contained in the Commission's draft proposals report.

4.8 Mr Conway Hawkins of Wick was pleased with the proposal that the Community should remain in The Vale of Glamorgan. He was concerned however that the Communities of Ewenny, St. Bride's Major and Wick were outside the Bridgend Parliamentary constituency and hoped that the Commission's review could recommend that the Parliamentary boundary should also be moved. He felt that this gave the Member of Parliament little incentive to develop contacts within The Vale of Glamorgan local authority.

4.9 Mr L and Mrs M James of Ogmores-by-Sea believed that they received high quality services from The Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council. They said that having had a democratic postal vote resulting in a clear choice from local residents, they hoped that no further expense will be necessary to settle the matter.

4.10 Mrs N E Smallwood of Ogmores-by-Sea said that if democracy is to survive, a vote of 74% to remain in The Vale of Glamorgan should be final and the Commission should listen to the voice of the people.

4.11 Dr A and Mrs S Warner of Ogmores-by-Sea believed that the village had been stripped from Bridgend and bulldozed into the Vale quite improperly several years ago and that there was no natural connection between Ogmores-by-Sea and Barry. They also felt that the voting pattern in the ballot had been skewed by the (apparently) lower community charge in the Vale and the voting was not made on 'a level playing field' and was thus flawed. They pointed out that people may not always vote wisely. Dr and Mrs Warner went on to list a number of points where they foresaw long term inconveniences and inefficiencies for residents if Ogmores-by-Sea were to remain in The Vale of Glamorgan.

4.12 Ordnance Survey had no comments to make about the Commission's draft proposals.

5. ASSESSMENT

5.1 We have considered carefully all of the representations made before and arising from our draft proposals report together with the views of electors as expressed through the ballot.

5.2 In its representation to us Bridgend County Borough Council commented on the relationship between the distances from the two county headquarters and the convenience of access to local government services. A similar point was also made by Dr and Mrs Warner in their letter to us. In considering this issue we took account of the results of the ballot of electors within the communities which we felt must, at least in part, be a reflection of the convenience to electors of belonging to The Vale of Glamorgan. Additionally we are aware that under the existing arrangements The Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council provides a number of services to the communities through local centres.

5.3 We would not dispute the evidence referred to by Bridgend County Borough Council that residents of the three communities continue to use leisure facilities, libraries and recycling and waste disposal facilities provided in Bridgend. We would suggest however that such a pattern is not confined to these communities and would be replicated in many settlements on the peripheries of local authority areas.

5.4 The question of responses to emergency situations was raised by Bridgend County Borough Council in its response to our draft proposals. We had noted the comments made previously by the Council about the location of fire, police and Coastguard stations. Clearly the locations of these facilities are fixed and are unaffected by changes in local authority boundaries. The organisation of these services is a matter for the relevant management authorities and need not be confined by county boundaries.

5.5 We were concerned that Bridgend County Borough Council felt that there was 'potential for confusion, time wasting and inefficiency' and that a speedy response to an emergency incident 'cannot be guaranteed if the status quo is maintained'. The need to formulate reaction plans to deal with emergencies will often involve co-operation between two or more local authorities and numbers of emergency services. In the case of the communities under review, we believe that this is a matter which is more

appropriately addressed through contingency planning and liaison with neighbouring local authorities and emergency services than by alterations to the boundaries of local authorities.

5.6 The Council told us that it did not believe that the result of the ballot of the three communities was an indication of better service provision by The Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council. They felt that that the result was influenced by the electors' desire not to be moved between local authorities. In their response to our draft proposals Dr and Mrs Warner suggested that the voting pattern had been skewed by differences in the amount of council tax levied by the two local authorities. When considering the ballot conducted as part of this review we took the result to be a straightforward indication of the opinion of the electorate on the question being asked of them. We do not believe that it would be appropriate or profitable for us to speculate on the reasoning behind the voting. We should perhaps reiterate that the Commission was not bound by the result of the ballot which formed only part of our decision making process. We also confirm that the result was considered together with all other evidence received before we formulated our draft proposals.

5.7 Bridgend County Borough Council referred to the fact that the local authority boundary is not aligned with the boundaries for Parliamentary, European or Welsh Assembly constituencies. They felt that our proposal missed an opportunity to bring these boundaries into line. It was also suggested to us by Mr Conway Hawkins that we should recommend changes to the Parliamentary boundary between the constituencies of Bridgend and The Vale of Glamorgan so as to make them conterminous with local authority boundaries. As is set out in paragraph 2.1 of this Report, the Commission's powers are confined to making proposals appearing to the Commission desirable in the interests of effective and convenient local government: the review of Parliamentary and other constituency boundaries is a matter for the Boundary Commission for Wales.

5.8 We noted the comments made by Bridgend County Borough Council in relation to the establishment of the current county boundary. We should point out that the boundary was established as a result of the reorganisation of local government and by the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994, which defined the County Boroughs of Bridgend and The Vale of Glamorgan. The Commission was not involved in defining the boundary, nor the consultation exercise that preceded it: the Commission's function is to review the existing boundary on the basis of the evidence now available to it, and to make proposals as to whether it should be changed.

5.9 We noted also the reservation contained in the representation from Ewenny and Vale Branch Labour Party which referred to the areas north of the River Ewenny which was formerly part of the Community of Ewenny but transferred to Bridgend County Borough Council in 1997. The areas in question now form part of the Community of Coychurch Lower and the community ward of Oldcastle within the Community of Bridgend. The directions issued to the Commission by the Secretary of State were specific and referred only to the Communities of Ewenny, St. Bride's Major and Wick. It was not therefore within our remit to review the areas referred to by Ewenny and Vale Branch Labour Party.

5.10 We have given the representations received in response to our draft proposals the most careful consideration, particularly those contained in the letter from Bridgend County Borough Council. For the reasons set out above, we do not think that those representations take the matter very much further, and indeed some of them (for example that contained in paragraph 5.7 above) refer to matters which in our view the Commission are not entitled to take account in carrying out this review. We refer

therefore to the conclusion contained in paragraph 5.3 of our draft proposals, and in particular our conclusion that either of the two authorities would be able to deliver services to meet the needs of the communities. Our conclusions on this issue were therefore finely balanced, and we have been assisted in formulating our final proposals, as we were in our draft proposals, by the representations which we have received and the results of the ballots of the electors in the communities. Taking all matters into consideration, the Commission conclude that the evidence points to the communities remaining in The Vale of Glamorgan.

6. PROPOSALS

6.1 We have undertaken the review in accordance with the Secretary of State's directions and propose that in the interests of effective and convenient local government the existing boundary between the County Boroughs of The Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend should remain. Under our proposal the Communities of Ewenny, St. Bride's Major and Wick would remain within the County Borough of The Vale of Glamorgan. The boundaries of the individual communities are unchanged.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

7.1 We wish to express our gratitude to The Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council, Bridgend County Borough Council, and the Community Councils of Ewenny, St. Bride's Major and Wick for their assistance and to all persons and bodies who made representations to us. We also thank Electoral Reform (Ballot) Services Limited for their work in conducting the postal ballot on our behalf.

8. RESPONSES TO THIS REPORT

8.1 Having completed our review of part of the boundary between the County Boroughs of Bridgend and The Vale of Glamorgan and submitted our recommendations to the National Assembly for Wales, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the directions issued by the Secretary of State for Wales.

8.2 It now falls to the National Assembly for Wales if it thinks fit, to implement them with or without modifications by means of an Order or to direct the Commission to conduct a further review. Such an Order will not be made earlier than a period of six weeks from the date that the Commission's recommendations are submitted to the National Assembly for Wales.

8.3 Any further representations concerning the matters in this report should be addressed to the National Assembly for Wales. They should be made as soon as possible, and in any event not later than six weeks from the date that the Commission's recommendations are submitted to the National Assembly. Representations should be addressed to :

Local Government Policy and Finance Division

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July 1999