

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

CABINET
20th June, 2017

REPORT AUTHOR: Solicitor to the Council
SUBJECT: Welsh Government Consultation – Proposed Reduction in the size of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Summary

Welsh Government is proposing to reduce the size of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) from 24 members to 18, bringing it into line with the Snowdonia and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities.

- 1.1 For Powys County Council this would mean a reduction in representation on the BBNPA from 8 to 6 members. Responses are required by 29th June, 2017.
- 1.2 The impact on individual political groups' representation would be as follows:

Political Group	Current	Revised	Change
Independent Group	3	2	-1
Welsh Conservatives	2	2	0
Welsh Liberal Democrats	1	1	0
Welsh Labour	1	1	0
Plaid Cymru / Green Party Group	1 (from Liberal Democrats)	0	-1
Total	8	6	

2. Responses from Political Groups

The Group Leaders of all the political groups have been consulted on the proposals and the responses are set out below.

- 2.1 Independent Group – No comment received.
- 2.2 Welsh Conservative Group – The Group did not wish to comment on the proposals.
- 2.3 Welsh Liberal Democrat Group – Comment received and included in response as Comment 2.
- 2.4 Welsh Labour Group – Comment received and included in response as Comment 1.
- 2.5 Plaid Cymru / Green Party Group – No comment received.

3. Consultation Response.

The responses above have been included in the Consultation Response From which is attached as an Appendix A. The Cabinet are asked to consider the consultation responses in Appendix A and decide which (if any) of the reponses will be sent to Welsh Government as the Council's response.

4. Statutory Officers

4.1 The Solicitor to the Council (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: " I have nothing to add to the report."

4.2 The Strategic Director – Resources (Section 151 Officer) notes the contents of the report.

5. Members' Interests

The Monitoring Officer is not aware of any specific interests that may arise in relation to this report. If Members have an interest they should declare it at the start of the meeting and complete the relevant notification form.

Recommendation:	Reason for Recommendation:
That the Cabinet approves the Council's response to the Consultation document.	To respond to the Welsh Government Consultation Document by 29th June, 2017.

Relevant Policy (ies):			
Within Policy:	Y	Within Budget:	Y

Relevant Local Member(s):	N/A
----------------------------------	------------

Person(s) To Implement Decision:	Wyn Richards, Scrutiny manager
Date By When Decision To Be Implemented:	29/06/2017

Contact Officer:	Wyn Richards, Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services
Tel:	01597-826375
Email:	wyn.richards@powys.gov.uk

Background Papers used to prepare Report:

Consultation Response Form

What do you think?

Question 1: What are your views on the proposal to reduce the membership of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority from 24 to 18?

Comment 1 - Powys County Council is satisfied with the proposed reduction in members of BBNPA and support the reasons stated.

Comment 2 - Before any reduction is considered it would be necessary to amend the various Acts, including the Environment Act, in order to allow for greater local democracy to support the people living in the Park. At present PCC is obliged to show political balance when appointing to the BBNPA. This has resulted in present and previous appointments being made with members from outside the Park area, mainly from Montgomeryshire being appointed to the Park to meet this requirement. Due to the low number representation from other authorities there is no such issue for them. The Environment Act suggests that members should come from wards wholly or partially within the Park. If the political balance is maintained and Powys numbers were decreased it would mean a further reduction in local members within the Park being appointed to the BBNPA. This can only be addressed by only allowing members with wards wholly or partially within the Park becoming authority members. This approach will support the need for National Parks to have more focus on social and economic development. This would also reduce the member travel costs. BBNPA is unique compared with the other two Welsh National Parks in having a much greater number of local authorities within its boundaries. We must also consider that 80% of the BBNPA lies within Powys together, with the majority of its residents, including the towns of Brecon, Crickhowell, Talgarth, Sennybridge and Hay on Wye. Any number reduction would need to reflect this and as such no reduction in the 8 members from Powys should be considered.

Question 2: What are your views on the proposed distribution of members of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority between the seven principal authorities and the Welsh Ministers as set out in Table 3?

Comment 2 - As previously mentioned the BBNPA is unique in the large number of authorities involved. We do not support a reduction in the Powys numbers due to 80% of the Park being within Powys. This would give Powys a disadvantage and would not compare favourably with the numbers representing the Pembroke and Snowdonia single authorities. The consultation mentions the BBNPA's use of Member Champions and ambassadors. However, experience has shown that they have little or no impact on the residents of the Park, with a lack of understanding of the social and economic needs of the Park communities. If any reduction is to be made it should come from the Welsh Minister's appointments. These members have no mandate from the residents of the Park and have little contact or understanding of residents' needs. Some live outside the National Park area and some live in England.

Question 3: We would like to know your views on the effects that reducing the membership of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:

i) opportunities for people to use Welsh and

ii) on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Comment 2 - Any reduction in numbers could cause a reduction in Welsh-speaking members and a desire to use Welsh within the authority.

Question 4: Please also explain how you believe the proposed actions could be formulated or changed so as to have:

i) positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and

ii) no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Comment 2 - As per question 3, it is largely about the commitment and desire of the senior management and members of the authority that the Welsh language is adequately supported.

Question 5: We have asked 2 specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Comment 1 - There are broader questions around functions (planning) that should also be considered. There are two planning authorities within Powys which is not conducive. Members of the group have suggested one planning authority could present opportunity for further savings and reduce any duplication.

Comment 2 - We do not support the proposed changes, as they have been prompted only by the need to reduce financial costs. The original numbers were put forward to reflect the unique position that the BBNPA is in, with seven local authorities involved. Any reduction would mean a reduction in democratic local representation. What is required is consideration of a new governance requirements, linked to local accountability and based on the emerging white paper on the future roles of National Parks.

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: