

**DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION CYMRU MEETING  
HELD AT 10:00 AM ON 29 MAY 2025 AT CP2 and via Teams**

**Present:** Bev Smith (Chair); Dianne Bevan, Frank Cuthbert, Ginger Wiegand, Bethan Williams Price, Karen Jones, Frances Duffy, Andrew Blackmore (Chair, Governance and Audit Committee)

**DBCC Officers attending:** Shereen Williams (Chief Executive); Tom Jenkins (Head of Reviews); Carys Vaughan (Review Officer); Mark Pascoe (Head of Democratic Health); Caitlin Lowry (Democratic Health Policy Officer) Ellie Chapman (Team Support Officer)

**Time Started:** 10:20

**Time Finished:** 12:15

**Apologies:** Michael Imperato; Roger Ashton-Winter (Senior Democratic Health Policy Manager)

**1. Declarations of Interest**

- 1.1. It was **noted** that Frank has become a member of a panel set up by WLGA to review allowances they pay to councillors in leading positions within WLGA.

**2. Chair's Briefing**

- 2.1. The Chair briefed the Commission on last month's Strategy Day, thanking everyone for their contributions.
- 2.2. The Chair briefed that there are three key strands to prepare for the elections - the electoral information platform, conducting electoral reviews and also completing the remuneration determinations report.
- 2.3. The Chair briefed that there would be a shift in the Board agenda, picking up on assurance and the frequency of reports. There will be a wider discussion on what Democratic Health is in the future.
- 2.4. The CE briefed that the Remit Letter has still not been issued other than the draft points shared by the Sponsor Division for the Strategy Day.
- 2.5. The Chair briefed that there would be a training session delivered by the Association of Electorates (AEA) to get a broader understanding of next year's upcoming Senedd Election.

- 2.6. The Chair briefed that there were two Electoral Review Programme Briefings conducted within the last week. It was **noted** that there was some concern from stakeholders on the impact of the upcoming Senedd election and how it involves the same group of people with a limited number of resources within the local authority to support the electoral reviews. It was **noted** that there are some concerns regarding the Welsh Government Order-making timeline for community reviews.
- 2.7. The Chair briefed that following interviews with 6 candidates for the GAC member, Jassa Scott has been appointed.
- 2.8. The Chair briefed that the Commissioner succession plan will be kept under review to ensure that the recruitment for new Commissioners is in line with the needs of the Commission. Engagement has taken place with the Sponsor Division on recruitment timelines. More information will be available over the coming months.

### **3. Minutes of the Commission meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

- 3.1. It was **Resolved** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 30 April 2025 as a correct record of the matters considered, subject to minor alterations.

### **4. Issues Arising**

- 4.1. It was **Resolved** to accept the Report as a whole noting the issue for later discussion in the meeting, and updated progress was also noted on the following issues:
- 4.2. **(Issue 1)** FOI Requests - The Commission received 2 FOI requests between 24 April 2025 – 22 May 2025.
- 4.3. **(Issue 2)** GAC Member – Interviews for the GAC member were held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2025
- 4.4. **(Issue 3)** Remit Letter - The Commission is currently awaiting the Remit Letter to be issued by Sponsor Division

### **5. EMB**

- 5.1. Consideration was given to the Report dated May 2025 by the EMB Chair and it was **noted**.
- 5.2. It was **noted** that the next meeting is on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June and meetings will be bi-monthly with the opportunity for them to be more frequent as the

election nears.

- 5.3. It was **noted** that a final draft of the governing documents is to be presented to the EMB at the June meeting for approval, which will then be shown to the DBCC at the July meeting.
- 5.4. It was **noted** that a strategic risk register has been prepared but will be presented at the August meeting.
- 5.5. It was **noted** that a steering group for the Welsh Election Information Platform(WEIP) has been set up to support the project manager and project team whilst decision making is vested in the EMB itself.
- 5.6. It was **noted** that the Chief Digital Officer for Welsh Government has agreed to provide a member of his team to give independent advice and support to the Group.
- 5.7. It was **noted** that, until the EMB procures a provider for the WEIP, the risk on the project will remain red as the Board needs to see a market response to the procurement.
- 5.8. It was **noted** that the EMB has worked with the AEA and the Electoral Commission to highlight the key risks to the delivery of the 2026 Senedd Election and how to mitigate them, with a detailed paper going to the Board on the 6<sup>th</sup> June.
- 5.9. It was **noted** that market engagement with the shortlisted suppliers for the WEIP has been done, with the list of companies being given to other bidders not on the shortlist so they can perform joint bids.
- 5.10. It was **noted** that mapping engagement activity has started to ensure there isn't overlap and duplication with the Electoral Commission. Informal conversations are being had with the Electoral Commission to avoid overlap.

## 6. Remuneration

- 6.1. Consideration was given to the Report dated May 2025 by the SDHPM
- 6.2. A discussion was held on the leader of the opposition payments as this role is less clear at the moment due to there being a more multi-party system in Wales currently. It was **noted** that the Remuneration Committee will leave this as a decision for councils.

- 6.3. It was **noted** that the questionnaire for senior salaries review should be going out soon. It will go to the commissioners to see the questionnaire. It was discussed that it could be promoted at the WLGA conference to be completed whilst there if finalised.
- 6.4. A discussion was held on engaging with CTC's. It was **noted** that the committee will come to the Board with a paper on further reviews of CTC's in either June or July.
- 6.5. It was **noted** that there will be a discussion in June on the evidence paper for setting the annual uplift rate which will then come to the commission for a decision.

## **7. Budget Report 2025-2026**

- 7.1. Consideration was given to the Report dated 29<sup>th</sup> May 2025 by the Finance Manager.
- 7.2. It was **noted** in June the first batch of funding for the information platform will be received and will be used for the cost of consultants.
- 7.3. It was **noted** that a quarterly update for the budget instead is recommended to utilise GAC, providing anything unusual in the intervening period is then escalated and brought to the attention of the commission.

## **8. Risk Management – Risk Register**

- 8.1. Consideration was given to the Report dated 29<sup>th</sup> May 2025 by the Finance Manager
- 8.2. It was **noted** that, on CR3, the EMB aims to produce a costed forward work programme at its August 2026 meeting which should assist in identifying whether the resources provided to the Commission are sufficient.
- 8.3. It was also **noted** that, on CR4, the EMB will be asked to formally approve adoption of the DBCC policy frameworks at its August meeting to help provide additional assurance on the corporate governance of the Commission given that the EMB can decide its own procedures
- 8.4. It was **noted** that, on CR6, there will be a stakeholder communications and engagement framework to support the work of the EMB which can then be incorporated into the Commission's wider work. It was discussed

that there needs to be an overarching communication strategy for the board promoting the DBCC and its functions as a whole and will be put in the forward plan.

- 8.5. It was **noted** that, on CR8 there is a risk the WEIP platform will not be ready in time for the 2026 elections and the aim for piloting it for a local election needs to be removed due to it not being possible.
- 8.6. It was **noted** that legal advice has been clarified and candidates statements can be submitted in the language they are comfortable with which mitigates the Welsh Language specifications risk.
- 8.7. It was **agreed** to remove the risk regarding the transfer of data as it has since been resolved.

## 9. Reviews Progress Report

- 9.1. Consideration was given to the Report dated 21<sup>st</sup> May by the Head of Reviews
- 9.2. It was **noted** that the order for the Carmarthenshire review has been published and sent to Ordnance Survey, Welsh government and Carmarthenshire County Council.
- 9.3. It was **noted** that the Brigend and Torfaen recommendations are still waiting to be submitted at which point the commission will then discuss the recommendations
- 9.4. It was **noted** that the decision for the Vale of Glamorgan review has been announced and there are no changes. The six week consultation period will begin on the 5<sup>th</sup> June.
- 9.5. It was **noted** that the six week consultation period for the Carmarthenshire review has started.
- 9.6. It was **noted** that the Caerphilly community review has not yet been approved by the Cabinet Secretary.

## 10. Senedd Lessons Learned Report

- 10.1. Consideration was given to the Report dated 13<sup>th</sup> May 2025 by the Head of Reviews and it was **noted**.

- 10.2. It was discussed that public consultations should be avoided at certain times of the year such as Christmas and August.
- 10.3. It was discussed that some consideration should be given to policy changes within the next Senedd with regards to the review process and how reviews are conducted, with further engagement at an early stage key stakeholders.
- 10.4. A discussion was held on there being more clarity on what is being changed for the next election, with more consideration being given to changes in the future rather than what is being retained. It was discussed that a key problem was with regards to Welsh place names and needing to seek legal advice and the lesson learnt was seeking legal advice from the outset.
- 10.5. It was discussed that the low level of responses on the second report suggests that despite difficulties with Welsh language names in general there was an acceptance of the recommendations.
- 10.6. It was discussed that using a mapping tool which allows people to make suggested changes could be looked into further for the future but at the time of the first review, the cost to incorporate it within the portal was too high, taking into account the limitation of the review i.e. pairing of Parliamentary constituencies as opposed to building constituencies by communities.
- 10.7. It was discussed that the terminology of 'informal policies' within the report should be changed as they were discussions instead.
- 10.8. It was discussed that a communications and engagement piece needs to come back to the Board soon including metrics on who was reached. This will then inform the boards approach to future communications and engagement strategy.

## **11. RCT Community Review**

- 11.1. Consideration was given to the Report dated 19<sup>th</sup> May 2025 by the Review Officer
- 11.2. It was **noted** that RCT council conducted this review themselves with input from the DBCC Review team with little public recommendations.

- 11.3. It was **noted** that the changes were in line with the council size policy with each community represented by no less than 7 councillors, a council area with no fewer than 700 electors and no wards with less than 250 electors.
- 11.4. It was **noted** that easily identifiable boundaries are used as determined by legislation to ensure boundaries follow a road or a river which is something that will not change overtime.
- 11.5. A discussion was held on why some areas don't have a community council. It was **noted** that it is up for the local residents to decide whether they would like one and for the council to put forward a referendum.
- 11.6. The recommendations in terms of boundaries and councillor numbers have been **agreed**.
- 11.7. It was **noted** that with regards to name changes, the board is still awaiting a decision from Welsh Government and so no decision by the Commission can be made yet.
- 11.8. It was discussed that there could be an informative session on the reviews process for the Commission.
- 11.9. **Action:** HoPP to run session to take Commissioners through the Review framework.

## **12. Calendar of Events**

- 12.1. The Commission **noted** the calendar.

## **13. Any Other Business**

- 13.1. There was no other business to discuss.

**Date of Next Meeting: 25th June 2025**