

LGBCE (17)12 Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 19 December 2017 at 12:45pm, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP

Commissioners Present

Professor Colin Mellors OBE (Chair)
Sir Tony Redmond (Deputy Chair)
Alison Lowton
Peter Maddison QPM
Andrew Scallan CBE
Steve Robinson

LGBCE Officers Present:

Jolyon Jackson CBE	Chief Executive
Lynn Ingram	Director of Finance & Resources
Marcus Bowell	Director of Strategy & Communications
Alison Evison	Review & Programme Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Jo Porter	Review Manager
Jonathan Ashby	Review Officer (item 5)
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (item 6)
Emily Starkie	Review Officer (item 7)
Dan Carlsson-Hyslop	Review Officer (item 8)
Dean Faccini	Business Support Officer (minutes)

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Declarations of interest

Steve Robinson declared an interest in item 9 (Cheshire West & Cheshire Final Recommendations) and took no part in the discussions of that item.

Jolyon Jackson declared an interest in item 5 (Carlisle Council Size) and item 10 (West Berkshire Final Recommendations) and took no part in the discussions of those items.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 21 November 2017

The minutes were agreed as a correct record, and were signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

In advance of the meeting, the Review and Programme Manager had informed the Commission of a mistake made by the team in not providing all the submissions received on the consultation for council size for the Basingstoke and Deane electoral review (which was considered at the Commission meeting in November). In light of this oversight, the Commission agreed to rescind the decision on council size taken at the November meeting and to invite further views on council size, so that a council size could be considered at the Commission meeting in February.

The Review and Programme Manager apologised for the error and indicated that an investigation about how this error occurred was being undertaken.

1. Operational Report - LGBCE (17)141

The Chief Executive presented the Operational Report for December and the Commission noted its content.

The Chief Executive spoke about the new authorities that may be established in 2019 following a 'minded to' decision by the Secretary of State. These authorities are:

- East Suffolk - merging Suffolk Coastal and Waveney into a new two-tier district council
- West Suffolk - merging Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury into a new two-tier district.
- Western Dorset - East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland merging into a new unitary authority
- Eastern Dorset - Bournemouth, Poole, Christchurch merging into a new unitary authority
- Taunton Deane and West Somerset - merging these existing districts into a new two-tier district.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had held meetings with representatives from Dorset, East and West Suffolk and Taunton Deane and West Somerset to discuss future electoral arrangements. The Chair and the Chief Executive had attended those meetings.

The Commission considered its potential involvement in undertaking reviews that would facilitate the establishment of any new authorities, recognising that it could not formally commence such reviews until Orders had been made by Parliament. Accordingly, the timescale would be very tight and, in order to be able to complete such reviews, then preliminary information would need to be assembled by DCLG,

working with the local authorities concerned, in advance of the start of such reviews. There would be no room for any slippage.

The Chair and Chief Executive had discussed the options in detail with DCLG officials and the outlines of a possible approach was considered, and approved, by the Commission. It also noted that, should timescales slip, DCLG would need to implement its own interim arrangements in order to allow the new authorities to come into being in May 2019. In such circumstances, the Commission would subsequently undertake its own reviews at an appropriate time. It was agreed, however, that it was the preference of all concerned – the new authorities, DCLG and the Commission – that reviews should take place prior to the establishment of new authorities and all were working to that end.

In furtherance of this issue, the Chief Executive informed the Commission of two additional meetings involving the Commission for 2018:

- a special Commission meeting that takes place on 9 October 2018
- a technical meeting for officers that would take place during the first week of January. This meeting is to be chaired by DCLG.

An update was given by the Director of Strategy and Communications about the Commission's correspondence with Sir Hugo Swire concerning a prayer against the East Devon draft Order. The Commission had offered to meet Sir Hugo, indicating that it would wish to make the order before the end of the calendar year. The offer had not been taken up and, accordingly, the Commission was content that the Order be now made.

An amendment to the Lead Commissioner allocations was agreed. Peter Maddison would now act as the Lead Commissioner for the review of Salford and Steve Robinson would act as the Lead Commissioner for Wiltshire.

2. South Somerset Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (17)142

The review of South Somerset District Council had commenced on 15 August 2017. According to the latest available electoral figures, 33 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with Brympton ward having a variance of 23 per cent.

At its meeting on 15 August 2017, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 60 and the Draft Recommendations being considered had been prepared on the basis of such a council size.

In preparing the draft scheme, the team had taken into consideration both the submissions it had received and the statutory criteria. The Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of seven three-, 12 two-, and 15 single member wards in total.

The Commission considered the recommendations in detail informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the advice of officers and the submissions received.

It agreed the Draft Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for South Somerset District Council as presented.

3. Oxford Council Size - LGBCE (17)143

It had been agreed to review Oxford City Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 67 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with 17 per cent of wards being over 20 per cent. One ward, Holywell, had a variance of 61 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 48 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representational arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support that the council size remain at 48 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 48 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 48 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

4. Carlisle Council Size - LGBCE (17)144

It had been agreed to review Carlisle City Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 32 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent. Two wards had variances of greater than 20 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 52 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representational arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers the council size decrease by seven from 52 to 45 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and noted the balance of argument and evidence that had been presented. In the circumstances, it agreed that further information should be sought before a decision could be taken and that the team should make contact with all the respondents to the consultation to clarify the information received in each of their submissions.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that further information should be sought from the respondents before they made their 'minded to' decision on the council size for Carlisle.

5. Preston Final Recommendations - LGBCE (17)145

The review of Preston City Council had commenced on 21 March 2017. According to the latest available electoral figures, 36 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, and one ward, University, had a variance of 40 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 March 2017, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 48 and had subsequently, on 15 August 2017, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 43 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, for the reasons highlighted in the team's report, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations in some aspects and these changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations put to the Commission for consideration.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 16 three-member wards in total.

The Commission considered the Final Recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the submissions received following publication of the Draft Recommendations.

It agreed the Final Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Final Recommendations for Preston City Council as presented.

6. Forest of Dean Final Recommendations - LGBCE (17)146

The review of Forest of Dean District Council had commenced on 21 March 2017. According to the latest available electoral figures, 15 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with four per cent of wards being over 20 per cent. One ward, Lydney East, is forecast to have a variance of 37 per cent by 2023.

At its meeting on 21 March 2017, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 39 and had subsequently, on 15 August 2017, agreed Draft Recommendations but based on a revised council size of 38 members since this figure provided for a better balance of councillors across the district.

Following publication, 36 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, for the reasons highlighted in the team's report, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations in some aspects and these changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations put to the Commission for consideration.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of five three-, seven two-, and nine single-member wards in total.

The Commission considered the Final Recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the submissions received following publication of the Draft Recommendations.

It agreed the Final Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Final Recommendations for Forest of Dean District Council as presented.

7. South Gloucestershire Final Recommendations – LGBCE (17)147

The review of South Gloucestershire Council had commenced on 21 March 2017. According to the latest available electoral figures, 4 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with six per cent of wards being over 20 per cent. One ward, Frenchay & Stoke Park, had a variance of 27 per cent, and Siston ward had a variance of 25 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 March 2017, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 61 and had subsequently, on 15 August 2017, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 157 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, for the reasons highlighted in the team's report, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations in some aspects and these changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations put to the Commission for consideration.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of eight three-, 15 two-, and seven single-member wards in total.

The Commission considered the Final Recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the submissions received following publication of the Draft Recommendations.

It agreed the Final Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Final Recommendations for South Gloucestershire Council as presented.

8. Cheshire West & Chester Final Recommendations – LGBCE (17)148

The review of Cheshire West & Chester Council had commenced on 21 March 2017 at the request of the Council. According to the latest available electoral figures, 20 per cent of wards had variances of 10 per cent, with four per cent of wards being over 20 per cent. One ward, Boughton, had a variance of 24 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 March 2017, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 69 and had subsequently, on 15 August 2017, agreed Draft Recommendations based on a modified council size of 70 members since this allowed for a better warding pattern

Following publication, 381 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, for the reasons highlighted in the team's report, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations in some aspects and these changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations put to the Commission for consideration.

The Commission considered the Final Recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the submissions received following publication of the Draft Recommendations. It agreed the final recommendations as presented, subject to maintaining a two-member Elton & Mickle Trafford ward. The Commission also agreed to conduct a period of further limited consultation focusing on the areas of Blacon, Chester City & the Garden Quarter and Great Boughton wards.

Agreed

The final recommendations, as presented, subject to retaining a two-member Elton & Mickle Trafford ward and a period of further limited consultation focusing on the areas of Blacon, Chester City the Garden Quarter and Great Boughton.

9. West Berkshire Final Recommendations – LGBCE (17)149

The review of West Berkshire Council had commenced on 17 January 2017. According to the latest available electoral figures, 20 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with Chieveley ward having a variance of 17 per cent.

At its meeting on 17 January 2017, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 42. Subsequently, on 15 August 2017 it agreed Draft Recommendations based on a revised council size of 43 members since this figure provided better levels of electoral equality.

Following publication, 75 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, for the reasons highlighted in the team's report, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations in some aspects and these changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations put to the Commission for consideration.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of five three-, nine two-, and 10 single member wards in total.

The Commission considered the Final Recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the submissions received following publication of the Draft Recommendations.

It agreed the Final Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Final Recommendations for West Berkshire Council as presented.

10. Mid-Suffolk Related Alterations – LGBCE (17)150

The Commission considered the content of the Mid Suffolk District Council Related Alterations paper. It was minded to agree to the related alteration for the reasons highlighted in the team's report.

Agreed

The Commission agreed to the making of an Order implementing the related alteration.

11. Chair's Report

The Chair expressed his thanks to all colleagues at the Commission for a successful year. He outlined some of the likely agendas for the coming twelve months.

12. Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive had the following updates:

- The Treasury raised no objections to the Commission's business case on its proposals for relocation. These proposals have since been accepted by the Public Bodies Relocation department.

- A supplementary estimate will be submitted to the Speaker's Committee in January 2018. This would likely include a note about our intention to relocate to new premises.
- The draft Corporate Plan (five-year plan) will be submitted to the Speaker's Committee in March 2018.

13. Director of Finance and Resources Report

The Finance and Resources Director had the following updates:

- Confirmation that the supplementary estimate will go to the Speaker's Committee in January,
- Following a meeting with the NAO, it is likely the supplementary estimate will include a £200K transfer from revenue to capital, which may add some pressure on our budget for 2018-19. The estimate will also need to take into account rent at Millbank Tower and the Commission's need to give six months notice.
- The VfM report (value for money) is likely to be ready for March. The NAO plan to produce a LGBCE guide.

14. Future KPIs – LGBCE (17)151

The Review and Programme Manager introduced proposals for a new set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) from 2018/19. The new set of KPIs would replace those that have been in place since the Commission's establishment in 2010.

The new set of KPIs would focus on the following areas:

- Electoral equality
- Stakeholder engagement
- Effective use of resources (primarily HR focused areas)

A prototype of the type of report the Commission would receive on a monthly and annual basis was shown.

The Commission considered the proposals. It agreed to the principles underpinning the new approach but asked for further consideration of:

- Clarity about how the targets would be set and presented.
- How the target value (the figure to the right of the value score) is recorded and measured, especially where this may involve multi-year progress targets.
- Consideration on how the RAG rating (depicted through colours) corresponds to figure in the value column.
- The value of trend arrows to indicate the direction of progress.

The paper would be re-presented to the Commission once further thought had been given to these issues.

15. Draft Corporate Plan – LGBCE (17)152

The Commission agreed to the first draft of the Corporate Plan.

16. Relocation Steering Group minutes – LGBCE (17)153

The Commission noted the Relocation Steering Group minutes from November.

The Finance and Resources Director confirmed that a meeting about the Commission's IT requirements at the new premises would be taking place tomorrow.

17. Role of Lead Commissioners in Electoral Reviews - LGBCE (17)154

The Chief Executive presented an updated paper on the Role of Lead Commissioners in Electoral Reviews. The paper had previously been approved by the Commission as a helpful framework to ensure both clarity about roles and expectations in relation to reviews and to achieve consistency in review processes.

The Commission agreed that the framework remained appropriate guidance and would re-visit the matter at its June meeting to check that the guidance was being consistently applied. This would mean that the new Commissioners would have had the opportunity to experience the approach and feedback their comments. In the meantime, if anyone felt that the guidance was not being followed they should draw this to the attention of the Chief Executive.

18. Future Business - LGBCE (17)155

Two items were raised:

- The Chief Executive will be looking to find a date for a Commission strategic event.
- The Business Support Officer is to add the Role of Lead Commissioners in Electoral Reviews paper to the June Commission meeting.
- It was noted that the February meeting was likely to involve a long agenda and, therefore, that it might be appropriate to have an earlier start time.

AOB

There were no other items.



Close of Business 16:43