

LGBCE (18)2nd Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 20th February at 13:15, in Belgravia Suite, 29th Floor, 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 (item 2)
Alison Evison	Review & Programme Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Jo Porter	Review Manager
Laura Taylor	Review Officer (item 3)
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (item 4)
Jonathan Ashby	Review Officer (item 5)
Dan Carlsson-Hyslop	Review Officer (item 6)
Dean Faccini	Business Support Officer (minutes)
Robert Busyman	NAO External Auditor (item 13)

Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Susan Johnson OBE.

Declarations of interest

Colin Mellors declared an interest in item 8 (Leeds Related Alterations), and took no part in the discussion of that item.

Steve Robinson declared an interest in item 7 (Cheshire & Cheshire West), and took no part in the discussions of that item. Steve also declared an interest in Dorset and

took no part in the discussion of item 1 (Operation Report) when the subject of Dorset came up as part of the Chief Executive's briefing.

Jolyon Jackson declared an interest in item 3 (Carlisle), and took no part in the discussions of that item.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 23 January 2018

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

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

1. Operational Report - LGBCE (18)13

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

The Commission considered a request from Carlisle City Council for their review to be delayed by a year. The Commission noted that it would be possible to achieve the target of making the Order six months prior to implementation and, accordingly that the review schedule should proceed as planned.

The Commission was advised that the initial consultation for warding patterns in the Oxford City review would be extended by two weeks. This was due to the Council accidentally including overseas electors in its electorate figures. Although this would not have a significant impact on the timing of the review, it would delay publication of both the draft and final recommendations by one month.

Charnwood Borough Council have been in contact with the Chief Executive over the possibility of submitting a formal request for an electoral review.

The Secretary of State has confirmed his decision to proceed with the mergers of East Suffolk and West Suffolk authorities. A decision on the merger of Dorset East, Dorset West and Taunton Deane & West Somerset has yet to be made.

The Chief Executive updated the Commission on his recent meeting with the Speaker's Committee. Both the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance & Resources attended the meeting to present the Commission's Supply Estimate.

The Chief Executive presented the council numbers that had been put forward by the proposed new authorities:

- Dorset
- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole
- Taunton Deane & West Somerset
- East Suffolk

- West Suffolk

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had invited comment on these proposals and the Commission noted the council numbers being proposed and made some general observations. It was agreed that the Chair, Deputy Chair and Chief Executive would convey these observations to MHCLG.

2. Basingstoke & Deane Council Size - LGBCE (18)14

It had been agreed to review Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 34.5 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with 3 per cent of wards being over 20 per cent. One ward, Rooksdown, had a variance of over 30 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 60 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 decrease by six from 60 to 54 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 54 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 54 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

3. Carlisle Council Size - LGBCE (18)15

Jolyon Jackson left the meeting and took no part in the discussion of this item.

It had been agreed to review Carlisle City Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 36 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.

At its meeting on 19 December 2017, the Commission agreed that further information should be sought from the respondents - and, specifically, the competing proposals (for a council size of 45 and for 39) that had been put forward during the initial consultation - before making their 'minded to' decision on the council size for Carlisle.

Further information had been received relating to these two council sizes in respect of how future governance and representational arrangements might operate with each of these sizes. LGBCE officers continued to find the evidence for both figures

finely balanced and, informed by all the evidence, judged that a council size of 42 might be an appropriate size.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. It shared the view that the quality of evidence presented in favour of 39 councillors and 45 councillors was finely balanced and, potentially, both could work. However, it noted that the figure of 42 had not been specifically put forward locally and that it did not believe it to appropriate to select another number that fell between the two submissions. On balance, the majority judged that the case being put forward for a council size of 39 was slightly stronger. Accordingly, they agreed that this should be the number used.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 39 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

4. Babergh New Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (18)16

The review of Babergh District Council had commenced on 18 April 2017. According to the 2015 electoral figures, 22 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 April 2017, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 32 and the New Draft Recommendations being considered had been prepared based on such a council size.

During the consultation stage on the draft recommendations, the team identified anomalies with the electorate figures that had been supplied across the district, but particularly in the south east and the Great Cornard areas of the authority following queries received from parishes. The team raised this with Babergh District Council who confirmed that the figures supplied were incorrect. The team met with the council to discuss the issue and the council subsequently provided a revised set of electorate figures. Given that the overall electorate had increased as a result of revisiting the figures, alongside the fact that inconsistencies were spread across the district and not constrained to a single area, the team was concerned that respondents may have proposed alternative patterns of wards had they had access to the correct figures. Accordingly, it would be appropriate to produce a new set of draft recommendations based on the revised electorate figures.

In preparing the new draft scheme, the team had taken into consideration all the submissions it had received so far in the review process and the statutory criteria. The New Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of three three-, five two-, and 13 single-member wards in total. These New Draft Recommendations will now be subject to an eight-week consultation.

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 New Draft Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

New Draft Recommendations for Babergh District Council as presented.

5. Mid Suffolk New Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (18)17

The review of Mid Suffolk District Council had commenced on 18 April 2017. According to the 2015 electoral figures, 37 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with 3 per cent of wards being over 30 per cent. One ward, Stowmarket North, has a variance of 32 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 April 2017, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 34 and the New Draft Recommendations being considered had been prepared based on such a council size.

During the consultation on the draft recommendations, the team identified anomalies with the electorate figures that had been supplied across the district but particularly in relation to a proposed housing development in the Chilton area of Stowmarket. It became apparent that the growth in this area had been applied across the parish rather than restricted to the relevant polling district. The team raised this with Mid Suffolk District Council who confirmed that the figures supplied were incorrect. The team met with the council to discuss the issue and the council subsequently provided a revised set of electorate figures. The team decided that because these changes to the electorate were significant (particularly in Chilton), respondents may have proposed alternative patterns of wards had they been in receipt of the correct figures. Accordingly, it would be appropriate to produce a new set of draft recommendations based on the amended set of electorate figures.

In preparing the new draft scheme, the team had taken into consideration all the submissions it had received so far in the review process and the statutory criteria. The New Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of eight two-, and 18 single-member wards in total. These New Draft Recommendations will now be subject to an eight-week consultation.

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 New Draft Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

New Draft Recommendations for Mid Suffolk District Council as presented.

6. Windsor & Maidenhead Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (18)18

The review of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead had commenced on 19 September 2017 following a request from the Council. According to the latest

available electoral figures, 22 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with two wards being over 20 per cent.

At its meeting on 19 September 2017, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 43.

In developing the Draft Recommendations, the team noted that the Borough Council's proposals had been developed using a different formula for calculating its 5-year electorate forecast than what had been agreed at the start of the review. The team considered the original forecast to be a sounder basis on which to develop the draft recommendations. Therefore, the proposals considered by the Commission had been based on the original forecast figures.

The team also noted that a further reduction in council size by one member from 43 to 42 councillors would ensure a more effective allocation of members across the borough, particularly in Windsor and those areas north of the River Thames. The team therefore developed a warding scheme based on a council size of 42 members.

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 four three-, and 15 two-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 Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead as presented.

7. Cheshire West & Chester Final Recommendations - LGBCE (18)19

Steve Robinson left the meeting and took no part in the discussion of this item.

The review of Cheshire West & Chester Council had commenced on 21 March 2017 following a request from the Council. According to the latest available electoral figures, 20 per cent of wards had variances greater than 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.

At its meeting on 19 December 2017, the Commission agreed the Final Recommendations for the authority subject to retaining a two-member Elton & Mickle Trafford ward and agreeing to a period of further limited consultation focusing on parts of the Chester city area. During the further limited consultation, 56 submissions had been received, which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, and for the reasons highlighted in the team's report, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations and adopt the alternative proposals for Chester city that had been the subject of further limited consultation. The Commission also agreed that the proposed Elton & Mickle Trafford ward be renamed Goway rural.

Agreed

Final Recommendations for Cheshire West & Chester Council as presented.

8. Leeds Related Alterations - LGBCE (18)20

Colin Mellors left the meeting and took no part in the discussion of this item.

The Commission considered the content of the Leeds City Council Related Alterations paper. It was minded to agree to the related alteration as the changes proposed would have no adverse effect on electoral equality.

Agreed

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

9. Chair's Report

The Chair formally welcomed the appointment of Susan Johnson as a Commissioner.

The Chair placed on record his gratitude to Sir Tony Redmond for all the work he had given to the LGBCE during his tenure as Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. Sir Tony would be leaving the Commission in March.

10. Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive had nothing further to add.

11. Director of Finance and Resources Report

Highlights from the Director of Finance and Resources report were:

- Informed the Commission of the interim audit that had taken place in the Business Team.
- Updated the Commission on the NAO VfM Study.
- Gave an update on the progress of the Commission's Main Estimate. This will go to the Speaker's Committee in March.
- Gave an update on the Commission's financial position; quarter 3 showed an underspend of £30K and a projected overall underspend of £30K to £40K.

12. Audit & Risk Committee - Chair's Report

Alison Lowton reported on the discussions that had taken place at the Audit & Risk Committee (ARC) meeting.

Highlights of those discussions were:

- Good progress had been made against the ARC Plan
- The Terms of Reference, ARC Appointments Protocol and a revamped version of the Risk Register would be presented to the Commission at its meeting in March.
- The NAO gave an update on their Final Accounts for 2017/18.
- The ARC had looked at the first draft of the Annual Report
- Amendments to the Commission's Personal Data policy had been approved
- ARC considered that further consideration by the Commission that community identity would be helpful together with use of associated equalities data.
- The ARC had agreed to its Review of Effectiveness questionnaire and strongly urged the Commission to carry out the same exercise.

13. NAO VfM Study - LGBCE (18)

Robert Busyman from the National Audit Office (NAO) presented the draft Value for Money (VfM) Study. This study takes the form of a short guide which provides a quick and accessible overview of the LGBCE and is designed to assist House of Commons select committees and members of Parliament.

The Chief Executive, the Director of Finance & Resources, and the Director of Strategy & Communications had previously provided comments on the draft report. The Commission had also identified some amendments and these were fed back to Richard.

The report will be finalised within the next two weeks so that it can be presented to the Speaker's Committee during the first week of March.

14. Corporate Plan - LGBCE (18)22

Subject to some minor amendments and a reworking on the presentation for the reduced unit costs page, the Commission approved the draft version of the Corporate Plan.

15. Future Business – LGBCE (18)23

The Future Business document was noted by the Commission.

AOB

The Chair asked the Chief Executive to organise a date for the next Commission strategy day.

Close of Business 15:54

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Melly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.