

LGBCE (17)3rd Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 21 March 2017 at 10:45am on Floor 29, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP

Commissioners Present

Professor Colin Mellors (Chair)
Sir Tony Redmond (Deputy Chair)
Dr Peter Knight CBE, DL
Alison Lowton
Peter Maddison

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
Lucy Dunkeyson	Review Manager
Laura Taylor	Review Officer (item 6)
Paul Kingsley	Review Adviser (item 7)
Mishka Mayers	Review Officer (item 8)
David Owen	Review Officer (item 9)
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (item 10)
Dan Carlsson-Hyslop	Review Officer (item 11)
Dean Faccini	Business Support Officer (minutes)

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 21 February 2017

Minor amendments and clarifications were made to:

- Item 2. Rotherham Council Size – LGBCE (17)13
- Item 5. Tendring District Council Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (17)16
- Item 11. Audit & Risk Committee – Chair's Report

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

1. Operational Report - LGBCE (17)21

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

Reviews and requests:

- Brighton & Hove City Council had withdrawn their request for a review.
- Copeland District Council have requested a review. The Chair and Chief Executive will meet with the council on 7 April.
- Eden District Council have indicated that they no longer wish to request a review.
- Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council have established a working group to consider the potential reduction of council size by one third which may lead to a review request.
- Warwick District Council have requested a review which the Commission agreed to add to the review programme.

Potential unitary councils

It was noted that three county areas were considering pursuing unitary requests for 2019 implementation:

- Buckinghamshire
- Dorset (possibility of two councils)
- Oxfordshire

Looking to 2020, it is understood that similar proposals might emerge for the establishment of unitary councils in Lincolnshire and in Northamptonshire.

All these proposals are dependent on DCLG approval and the Commission will keep in touch with DCLG as, and when, further information becomes available. It was important that the Commission, without itself anticipating particular outcomes, was well placed to respond to requests for electoral reviews in a timely manner if, in the event, any of these proposals were agreed for implementation. The same approach would apply to the small number of proposed mergers that are being discussed.

The Chief Executive touched upon the improvements made by the team to the way it manages the review programme workload. As a result of these improvements, amendments have been made to the timetable which will see modest rescheduling of four reviews. The Commission endorsed the changes.

The Chief Executive and the Lead Commissioner will meet with the leader of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council who was unavailable at their initial meeting.

2. Forest of Dean Council Size - LGBCE (17)22

It had been agreed to review Forest of Dean Council at the request of the local authority. According to the latest available electoral figures, 15 per cent of wards had variances of 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 over 37 per cent by 2023.

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 decrease by 9 from 48 to 39 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 39 members.

Agreed

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

3. South Gloucestershire Council Size - LGBCE (17)23

It had been agreed to review South Gloucestershire Council at the request of the local authority. According to the latest available electoral figures, 14 per cent of wards had variances of 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.

The current size of the Council is 70 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 9 from 70 to 61 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 61 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 61 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

4. Cheshire West and Chester Council Size - LGBCE (17)24

It had been agreed to review Cheshire West & Chester Council at the request of the local authority. According to the latest available electoral figures, 20 per cent of wards had variances of 10 per cent or more with four per cent of wards being over 20 per cent. One ward, Boughton, had a variance of 24 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 75 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 increase/decrease by six from 75 to 69 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 69 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 69 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

5. Preston Council Size - LGBCE (17)25

It had been agreed to review Preston City Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 36 per cent of wards had variances of 10 per cent or more and one ward, University, had a variance of 40 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 57 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 9 from 57 to 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.

6. Blackburn with Darwen Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (17)26

The review of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council had commenced on 15 November 2016. According to the latest available electoral figures, 30 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with one ward, Audley, being over 20 per cent.

At its meeting on 15 November 2016, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 51 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 17 three-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 Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council as presented.

7. North East Derbyshire Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (17)27

The review of North East Derbyshire District Council had commenced on 15 November 2016. According to the latest available electoral figures, four per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with one ward, Renishaw, having a variance of 35 per cent.

At its meeting on 15 November 2016, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 53 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 10 three-, nine two-, and five 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 North East Derbyshire District Council as presented.

8. Bolsover Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (17)28

The review of Bolsover District Council had commenced on 15 November 2016. According to the latest available electoral figures, 25 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with 20 per cent of wards having a variance of over 20 per cent. One ward, Shirebrook East, had a variance of 29 per cent.

At its meeting on 15 November 2016, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 37 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 four three-, twelve two-, and one single-member ward 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 Bolsover District Council as presented.

9. Ribble Valley Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (17)29

The review of Ribble Valley Borough Council had commenced on 15 November 2016. According to the latest available electoral figures, 21 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with four per cent of wards having variances of 20 per cent. One ward, Whalley, had a variance of 30 per cent.

At its meeting on 15 November 2016, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 40 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 14 two-, and 12 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 Ribble Valley Borough Council as presented.

10. Manchester Final Recommendations – LGBCE (17)30

The review of Manchester City Council had commenced on 19 July 2016. According to the latest available electoral figures, 16 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with one ward, Cheetham, having a variance of 35 per cent.

At its meeting on 19 July 2016, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 96 and had subsequently, 15 November 2016, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 14 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, 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 32 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 Manchester City Council as presented.

11. North Norfolk Final Recommendations – LGBCE (17)31

The review of North Norfolk District Council had commenced on 21 June 2016. According to the latest available electoral figures, 47 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with Happisburgh ward having a variance of 19 per cent more electors than average, and Sheringham North ward having a variance of 19 per cent fewer.

At its meeting on 21 June 2016, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 40 and had subsequently, on 15 November 2016, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 116 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, 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 two-, and 24 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 North Norfolk District Council as presented.

12. Chair's Report

The Chair updated the Commission about his meeting – together with the Chief Executive and the Director of Strategy and Communications - with Bridget Phillipson MP, who had replaced Gary Streeter as the Commission's spokesperson on the Speaker's Committee. The Commission's annual meeting with the Committee would take place on Wednesday 29 March.

It was noted that there would be a policy workshop on approaches to council size (including for new and merged authorities) immediately following the Commission meeting.

13. Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive had nothing additional to report.

14. Director Finance & Resources Report

The Director of Finance & Resources had nothing additional to report.

15. Electorate Forecasting – LGBCE (17)32

The Director of Strategy and Communications introduced a paper setting out a proposed new approach to electorate forecasting which was intended to be both more robust and, potentially, reduce the burden on local authorities and the Commission.

The Commission considered the report in detail and agreed to a pilot of the new methodology in respect of the preliminary stages of three forthcoming electoral reviews. A report on the pilot – focusing on its suitability, ease of use, and transparency - would be considered by the Commission at its October meeting. If found suitable, the new approach would be rolled out for future electoral reviews.

The Director of Strategy and Communications was also asked to provide a briefing on questions that sometimes occur about forecasts, including issues about specific groups on the electoral register such as students and EU nationals.

17. Future Business – LGBCE (17)33

An update was given on the forthcoming seminar with Professor Tony Travers.

Peter Maddison indicated his unavailability for the meeting scheduled on 18 July. The Commission looked at the proposed agenda and confirmed that Peter's absence would not make the meeting inquorate.

AOB

There were no other items.

Close of Business 14:20

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