

BCFE (08) 13th Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on Monday 6 October and
Tuesday 7 October 2008 at 10.30am at Hitchin Priory
Conference Centre, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 2DL

Present:

Max Caller CBE (Chair)
Robin Gray
Joan Jones CBE
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL
Professor Ron Johnston
Jane Earl
Professor Colin Mellors

Also present:

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| Archie Gall | Director |
| Gareth Nicholson | Media Relations Officer |
| Graham Essex-Crosby | Local Government Adviser |

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| Sam Hartley | Review Manager (7 October only) |
| Richard Buck | Review Manager |
| Alison Wildig | Review Manager |
| William Morrison | Review Officer (Norfolk) |
| Kalim Anwer | Review Officer (Suffolk) |
| Tim Bowden | Review Officer (Devon) |
| Jessica Metherringham | Review Officer (Durham) |
| Arion Lawrence | Review Officer (Northumberland) |

1. Minutes of the last meeting: 25 September 2008 BCFE (08) 12th Meeting

- 1.1 The minutes were approved.

2. Matters arising

- 2.1 The Chair updated the Committee on the recent meeting of the Electoral Commission. There were no other matters arising not to be covered in the agenda.

3. Electoral review of Durham: council size – BCFE (08) 38

- 3.1 The Review Officer (Durham) presented a paper on the consultation regarding the council size of Durham County.
- 3.2 Committee members reported on a meeting with Durham County Council in August which indicated that a robust submission would not be achievable by 15 September deadline. The Review Team has sought information from the council regarding timelines of its broad consultation on the local arrangements for the new authority, but this has not been provided yet.
- 3.3 The Review Officer outlined that there was still a lack of progress on determining a management structure and there is still the belief that Durham County Council wants 126 members. The Committee noted that the rationale for the proposed council size seemed primarily based on comparative analysis with other authorities of a similar demographic. The focus seemed to be on workload and electoral ratio ratios only. The Review Officer reported to the Committee that there would be a further working session with Durham County Council to gather additional evidence.
- 3.4 The Committee agreed that the structure of the new unitary authority will drive the number of councillors and that the structure of the new authority needed to be agreed before the council size can be appropriately determined, The Director agreed to compose a letter to Durham County Council offering assistance to the authority in providing the evidence required. Two Committee members (The Chair and Professor Mellors) agreed to attend a meeting with Durham County Council on the matter.

4. Electoral review of Northumberland: council size – BCFE (08) 38

- 4.1 The Review Officer (Northumberland) presented a report on the consultation regarding the council size for the new Northumberland unitary authority.

- 4.2 The Committee discussed the report and agreed that they were minded to adopt the proposed 67 member council unless there was compelling evidence for a 79 member council, which only seemed justified on the basis of increasing electorates. It was also noted that the rationale seems motivated by the council's strong opposition to implementation of the new electoral arrangements before 2013. The Review Team agreed to work further with Northumberland County Council.

5. Structural review report skeleton – BCFE (08) 39

- 5.1 The Director introduced a report on the structural review reports skeleton.
- 5.2 The Committee discussed whether there should be separate reports for the Norfolk and Suffolk structural reviews. After some debate, it was agreed that since the Secretary of State had asked three separate questions regarding Norwich (Norfolk), Ipswich (Suffolk) and Exeter (Devon), there should be three separate reports to answer the three separate questions.
- 5.3 The Committee outlined approaches that it wished to take in relation to the structure, including describing the process, how we have understood the questions put to us and what the Committee has done in order to provide sound advice to the Secretary of State. It was agreed to clarify the position in relation to the status quo and Lowestoft being included in Norfolk in both the draft proposals and the 'other' patterns.
- 5.4 The Committee discussed the contents of technical appendices to each of the reports which will include the detail of the financial information and analysis of the submissions received. The Committee discussed what the analysis of the submissions should look like. The Committee requested a geographic density breakdown of responses but stressed that the breakdown should not be crude in classifying the various types of representations. The team agreed to work on a model of statistically analysing the representations and geographic spread to form part of the technical appendix and to support the Committee in its decision-making.
- 5.5 It was also agreed that information gathered from various meetings around the counties needed to be considered in conjunction with the submissions.
- 5.6 The Committee considered how much detail it wished to include in relation to the associated arrangements for any new unitary authority. The Committee agreed that it would not be able to precisely specify the arrangements as this was a matter for the new unitary authority but wished to set out the clear principles that would be necessary in a particular unitary pattern for it to be successful in the Committee's judgment.

- 5.7 The Committee stressed to the Review Team the importance of agreeing the generic sections of the final reports prior to any consideration of specific patterns of advice.

6. Structural reviews update: including financial information

- 6.1 The Review Manager (Norfolk and Suffolk) gave an update on the initial consideration of the financial data received from local authorities by the Committee's independent financial consultants who noted the difficulty in those areas where there is no 'champion' for a particular authority.

7. Structural reviews: Norfolk submissions – BCFE (08) 40

- 7.1 The Review Officer (Norfolk) presented a report on the submissions regarding the Norfolk structural review.
- 7.2 The team noted that the 'wedge' option should have been included in the 'summary' paragraph of paper BCFE (08) 40.
- 7.3 The Committee requested more evidence justifying the northern inclusions in the wedge pattern and why the southern border did not extend down to the county boundary in the Great Yarmouth submission. The Committee also questioned whether there was local support in the parishes Great Yarmouth are proposing to add onto the wedge.
- 7.4 The Committee discussed the patterns which do not have clear 'champions' and whether they will attract a broad cross-section of support.

8. Structural reviews: Norfolk further info

- 8.1 After considering responses from local authorities to date, the Committee agreed to ask a number of questions locally:
- In Great Yarmouth Borough Council's 'Norwich City Region', what were the reasons behind the defining of the Northern and Southern boundaries, in particular why were certain rural parishes selected to be part of the authority? What evidence is there of a measure of support for the 'remainder' of Norfolk?
 - Would the 'Norwich City Region' as submitted by Great Yarmouth Borough Council work with and without Lowestoft?
 - What evidence is there of a measure of support existing outside the areas of Greater Norwich in the 'doughnut' pattern?

9. Structural reviews: Suffolk submissions – BCFE (08) 41

- 9.1 The Review Officer (Suffolk) presented a paper on the Suffolk structural review.

- 9.2 The Committee noted the representations in support of East/West/North Haven and noted the issues that were similar to a division of Norfolk into an East and West pattern.
- 9.3 The Committee discussed the concerns expressed regarding democratic deficit under various patterns and how they could be off set by the role played by Parish and Town Councillors.
- 9.4 It was noted that information in the joint submission put forward by Forest Heath, St Edmundsbury and Waveney, could be applied to a rural Suffolk unitary authority.
- 9.5 The Committee noted that the East/West split line from the north would need to be justified in light of the parishes' support. However, there would be a need to consult on these boundaries if the Committee were minded to support the proposition at this stage.
- 9.6 The Committee agreed to be clear in the final report about ceremonial arrangements for the county. The Committee discussed the potential role of regeneration companies in Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth.
- 9.7 There was some discussion on addressing the notion of a unitary authority affecting the role of Ipswich in a countywide unitary authority which may have a potential focus on the rural areas to the detriment of the city.

10. Structural reviews: Suffolk further info

- 10.1 After considering responses from local authorities to date, the Committee agreed to ask a number of questions locally:
 - Under the various concepts, would any new unitary authority responsible for the Ipswich area consider conducting a community governance review in order to ensure consistent neighbourhood arrangements?
 - What are the views on the proposal which includes Hadleigh in the North Haven unitary authority given the mixed views expressed by the District and Parish Councils.

11. Structural reviews: Devon submissions – BCFE (08) 42

- 11.1 The Review Officer (Devon) presented a paper on the Devon structural review.
- 11.2 There followed some discussion about the sensitivity of the financial analysis if it were proposed to move parishes within the Exeter/Exmouth UA into the Devon UA and still keep within the affordability criterion.

11.3 The Committee discussed the responses received to some of the questions it highlighted in the report. It was considered that further information may be needed about the focussing of the Devon Strategic Partnership

11.4 The Committee were informed of the formal requests for external boundary reviews by Plymouth City and Torbay Borough.

12. Structural reviews: Devon further info – BCFE (08) 43

12.1 After analysing the response from Exeter City Council, it was considered it may be necessary to ask a further question in regards to the boundaries of this pattern, but considered that before doing so a careful analysis of the CURDS material and the representations received during the consultation period should be undertaken to consider whether such questions were necessary.

12.2 Following a discussion of the response to the consultation from Devon County Council, the Committee considered it may be necessary to ask a question for clarification on the differences, as perceived by Devon County, in regards to the models of Community Boards and Community Forum. This would be subject to further scrutiny of the representations the Committee has received.

13. Structural reviews: communication strategy – BCFE (08) 44

13.1 The Committee agreed the paper outlining the broad communications activities around the publication of the final advice. It was considered that the Communication Directorate will table a handling plan for information closer to the publication date.

14. Any other business

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