

## LGBCE (10) 8th Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 9 November 2010, at 10.00am  
in Room B, Layden House, 76-86 Turnmill Street, London,  
EC1M 5LG

Present:

Max Caller CBE (Chair)  
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL (Deputy Chair)  
Jane Earl  
Joan Jones CBE  
Professor Colin Mellors

Also present:

Alan Cogbill	Chief Executive
Archie Gall	Director of Reviews
David Hewitt	Director of Finance
Joan D'Souza	Review Manager
Sam Hartley	Review Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Marcus Bowell	Communications & Public Affairs Manager
Sarah Vallotton	Business & Committee Services Manager
David Owen	Policy and Research Officer
Arion Lawrence	Review Officer (items 12-17)
Lisa Siggins	Review Officer (items 12-17)
Alex Skerten	Review Officer (items 12-17)
Simon Keal	Review Officer (items 12-17)
Kathleen Peacock	Business Support Officer (Minutes)

### **1. Minutes from LGBCE's meeting on 6 October 2010 and Matters Arising**

The minutes from the 6 October 2010 were agreed as an accurate record.  
There were no matters arising other than those to be discussed as  
substantive agenda items.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

The following Declarations of Interest were received;

- 2.1 Peter Knight declared an existing interest in Staffordshire.
- 2.2 Joan Jones declared an existing interest in Gloucestershire.
- 2.3 Jane Earl declared an existing interest in Slough and Oxfordshire.
- 2.4 Max Caller declared an existing interest in Hertfordshire and registered a new interest in the London Borough of Brent.
- 2.5 David Hewitt declared an existing interest in Rushmoor.
- 2.6 Alex Skerten declared an interest in Rushmoor

## **3. Chair's Report**

An update from the Chair on recent events was received.

Noted:

- 3.1 The Chair had been regularly attending meetings about reviews with MPs and representatives from the House of Lords to keep them informed of LGBCE's review-related activity and the Order laying process. These meetings had been both appreciated and well received.
- 3.2 Earl Cathcart and Lord Harris of Haringey had both agreed to respond on behalf of the LGBCE, in any debates in the House of Lords in relation to an LGBCE Order.
- 3.3 The Chair updated the Commission on the progress that had been made on the appointment and reappointments to the Commission. Announcements were believed imminent.

## **4. Chief Executive's Report**

The Chief Executive summarised the report entitled 'Outcome of Speaker's Committee examination of LGBCE plan & Budget – Next Steps.'

Noted:

- 4.1 The Chief Executive indicated that the meeting with the Speaker's Committee had gone well and two points would need to be followed up.
- 4.2 The Chair had responded to Grant Shapps' question about the LGBCE's capacity for some minor 'tidying up' of PABRs in which he suggested that, with new procedures, LGBCE should be able to accommodate approximately 30 requests a year alongside the more extensive PABRs. This would need to be reflected in future planning of the PABR programme as a whole.
- 4.3 Second, there were some concerns raised about the current KPIs which had been formulated last year under the auspices of the Electoral Commission. It was accepted that these needed revision and the LGBCE Senior Management Team would be working on possible improvements which would then come to the Commission for approval.

- 4.4 The Scrutiny Unit had also raised the issue of the Commission's management programme. All agreed that predicting the demand for PABRs over the coming 12 months may prove challenging.

## **5. Audit Committee**

The Chair of the Audit Committee summarised the issues raised during the Audit Committee meeting on 8 November 2010.

Noted:

- 5.1 Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee had now been agreed, and would be reviewed on an annual basis.
- 5.2 Three Internal Audit Progress Reports will come to the February Audit Committee.
- 5.3 Neil Sayers would shortly be replaced by Susan Ronaldson as NAO Director with responsibility for the Commission. The Chief Executive is to write a letter of thanks to Neil for his work with the Commission.
- 5.4 Deborah Cripps has returned from extended sick leave to resume the LGBCE's Head of Internal Audit, under the contract with RSM Tenon.
- 5.5 NAO had explained the 50% increase in their fee from £10,000 to nearly £15,000. This is a non-cash notional cost.
- 5.6 NAO would be meeting officers later in the week to plan the required Value for Money Study of the LGBCE.

## **6. First 6 Months finance Review & Update on Budgets for 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012**

The Director of Finance outlined the financial forecast figures for the coming 18 months.

Noted:

- 6.1 An underspend had been forecast for year end 2010-11 and the details of this forecast have been submitted to, and discussed with, the Speaker's Committee.
- 6.2 A new up to date forecast for the second 6 months of operation had now been made, based on more detailed operational costs, but not yet fully tested against all review managers' assessments of the intensity and pace of our programme.
- 6.3 As part of the LGBCE's budget management strategy, areas for possible investment are being researched to provide long term improvements in capability and efficiencies. This might include: staff training programmes and the purchase of operational software that will stream-line processes and provide longer term savings when the Commission's budget becomes more restrictive. Commissioners endorsed the desirability of looking to improve processes now, in support of the new procedures which were going out for consultation.
- 6.4 The Director of Finance was liaising with the Commission's Auditors to ensure all liabilities are included this year. The budget lines will also be recalculated to show VAT expenditure against the correct items and to

indicate more clearly the reasons for LGBCE's underspending this year and why it would not persist into future years.

## **7. Future Business**

The Future Business paper was considered by the Commission.

Agreed:

- 7.1 That the electoral review and PABR working groups would meet in the New Year to consider the responses received to the Commission's two consultation papers, if there was a substantial response to consultations.

## **8. Operational Report**

The Director of Reviews gave an update on the Operational Report and the Review Risk Register which covers Operational Risks.

- 8.1 The next batch of eight orders will be ready for Laying in Parliament on 29 November 2010. The first 4 Orders, if no prayers are sustained against them in the statutory period, will be made in January 2011. Maps are being printed with this date. The short delay between the end of the statutory period and making, does not afford extended opportunity for Parliamentary challenge. The Councils affected will be notified as soon as the way is clear for making the orders in January and they may now rely on them for electoral administration.
- 8.2 The Commission agreed minor amendments to the risk scores.

Agreed:

- 8.3 That the Order-making manual be re-circulated to Commissioners, and links provided to Commissioners for the Parliamentary site. This will enable better tracking of Orders through the Parliamentary process.
- 8.4 The likelihood score for Risk 2 would be changed to Medium.
- 8.5 That the Impact Score for Risk 11 would be changed to a Low Risk.

## **9. Electoral Review Delivery Report**

The Director of Reviews spoke to the Electoral Review Delivery Report.

Noted:

- 9.1 It is important to ensure that any local authorities requesting reviews can be slotted into the Review schedule where necessary or receive advice from the LGBCE in a timely fashion.
- 9.2 Commissioners found the Review Officers' Key Activities table highly informative of what needed to be done, although not necessarily of its sequencing. It was a useful Induction tool for Commissioners. A parallel flowchart for Commissioners' activities would be useful.
- 9.3 LGBCE needed to be flexible enough to ensure that the LGBCE is able to fit in with local authorities' governance timetables.

- 9.4 The importance of timing any additional reviews to fit in with LGBCE's work programme was also highlighted.

Agreed:

- 9.5 The Chair will write to the Leaders of all relevant local authorities (copied to the Chief Executives) inquiring about potential interest in PABRs and/or electoral reviews. This letter will be timetabled to tie-in with the Commission's two consultation exercises.
- 9.6 The structure of review papers presented at Commission meetings would be reviewed, to highlight which parts of the reports were deemed essential.

## **10. Draft PABR Consultation Paper**

The Policy and Research Officer spoke to the draft consultation on policy and procedures for principal area boundary reviews.

- 10.1 The consultation paper will be made available on the LGBCE's website and an email link will be sent to all local authorities inviting them to respond to the consultation and contact the LGBCE if further information was required.
- 10.2 Letters about the consultation will be sent directly to local authorities who have shown interest in PABRs in the past.

Agreed:

- 10.3 The draft consultation paper, subject to the editorial amendments suggested by the Commission and final sign off by the Chair and Chief Executive.

## **11. Draft Electoral Review Consultation Paper**

- 11.1 The Committee considered the Draft Electoral Review Consultation Paper and made suggestions for improving the draft.

Agreed:

- 11.2 The publication of the consultation paper, subject to the recommended changes by the Commission and final sign off by the Chair and Chief Executive.
- 11.3 The points at 10.1-10.3 applied equally to the electoral review consultation paper.

## **12. Broxbourne Borough Council: Council Size**

The Commission reviewed the council size submissions for Broxbourne Borough Council.

Noted:

- 12.1 That Broxbourne currently has 38 members, comprising 13 wards of which 12 have 3-member wards and one ward has two members.

- 12.2 The Council submission proposed a reduction in councillor numbers to 30, outlining how it could operate effectively with a reduced council size, under both its existing committee structure and in the event that it moved to a leader and executive model of political management.
- 12.3 A further 11 representations had been received, including from the Broxbourne Borough Council Labour Group, which requested an increase in size to 39 members in which it expressed concern that a reduced council size would hinder the authority in effectively scrutinising council decisions..
- 12.4 All of the submissions were carefully considered by the Commission.

Agreed:

- 12.4 That it was minded to recommend a council size of 30 members for Broxbourne Borough Council for the purposes of the next stage of the review.

### **13. Staffordshire County Council: Council Size**

The Commission reviewed the council size submissions for Staffordshire County Council.

Noted

- 13.1 That Staffordshire currently has 62 members elected from 59 divisions.
- 13.2 Eight submissions had been received during the review process, of which seven (including the Council) supported the current councillor numbers of 62.
- 13.3 One submission, from a local resident, supported a reduction to 60 councillors on the basis of a fairer allocation of councillors between the constituent districts of the county.
- 13.4 The evidence in the submissions received supported, a council size of 62. Some evidence had been received to support how the council would operate under this council size in the future.
- 13.5 The Commission noted that the council was proposing the adoption of single member divisions.

Agreed:

- 13.6 That it was minded to recommend, for the purposes of the next stage of the review, that Staffordshire County Council retains a number of 62 members based on their predicted increases in workload. However the Commission noted that a final recommendation on council size would depend on the levels of electoral equality that could be achieved as part of any future scheme; a fact that should be made clear in correspondence to the council.

### **14. Rushmoor Borough Council: Council Size**

The Commission reviewed the council size submissions for Rushmoor Borough Council.

Noted:

- 14.1 That Rushmoor currently has 42 councillors, and a pattern of 14 three-member wards.
- 14.2 The LGBCE had received one substantive submission, from Rushmoor Borough Council, recommending a reduction in councillor numbers to 39 from the current 42. Details of how the Council's governance structure would be adapted to accommodate this reduction, had been included in the submission.
- 14.3 It had also received a submission from a local Residents' Association proposing a council size of 36 members.

Agreed:

- 14.4 That it was minded to recommend a council size of 39 Councillors for Rushmoor Borough Council for the purposes of the next stage of the review.

## **15. Gloucestershire County Council: Council Size**

The Commission reviewed the council size submission for Gloucester County Council.

Noted:

- 15.1 The county is made up of 53 divisions with 63 members. This was a single-member division review in light of a formal request from the authority in 2009.
- 15.2 18 Submissions had been received including separate submissions from the County's political groups. The Council itself had not made a submission. Ten of the submissions received supported retaining the existing number of councillors. However the other 8 submissions received recommended a range of councillor numbers from 53 through to 68.
- 15.3 The Conservative Group on the County Council proposed a council size of 53, based on a single member ward pattern. It argued that this was both in line with its manifesto commitment and reflected the need to reduce costs in the current economic climate.
- 15.4 A joint submission from the Liberal Democrat and Labour Groups proposed retaining the existing council size. In particular, it argued that previous surveys as well as the localist agenda of Central Government would require this.
- 15.5 On balance, that the Conservative Group's evidence appeared strongest. While not providing detailed information as to the Council's proposed structure under a 53 member council, the group had had regard both to future trends in member workload as well as the need to responsibly reduce costs to the Council.

Agreed:

- 15.6 That it was minded to recommend a council size of 53 councillors for Gloucestershire County Council for the purposes of the next stage of the review.

## **16. Teignbridge Related Alterations**

The Commission reviewed request from Teignbridge District Council for a Related Alteration Order, following a community governance review the Council had conducted.

Noted:

- 16.1 The Council appeared to have undertaken a full consultation with all interested parties;
- 16.2 Only 48 residents would be affected by the proposed ward boundary change, with minimal effect on electoral equality.

Agreed:

- 16.3 To make a Related Alteration Order to give effect to the District Council's request

## **17. Timetabling of Slough Review**

The Commission reviewed the Slough Borough Council paper.

- 17.1 The Commission had previously agreed to undertake an FER review of Slough, as 36% of its wards have an electoral variance of 10% or more, based on December 2009 electorate figures.
- 17.2 The review had been scheduled to commence in September 2010. However, it had been deferred when Slough officials confirmed that the Council would be considering undertaking a consultation on moving to whole council elections from May 2011.
- 17.3 Slough officials made a request for the review to take place after the May elections in 2011..
- 17.4 Slough had now confirmed that it would not be moving to whole council elections but had indicated that it may do so in four years time.
- 17.5 The Council had outlined its concerns the impact of holding all out elections to implement changes to electoral arrangements following a review might have on any decision the Council might take in 2014 to move to whole council elections.

Agreed:

- 17.6 The review will commence after local elections in May 2011, and the Chair and Deputy Chair will visit the Group Leaders in November to discuss the process.

## **12.45 Meeting Closed**