

## LGBCE (16)01 Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> January, at 9.30 am, in Meeting Room, 29<sup>th</sup> Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP

### Commissioners Present

Professor Colin Mellors (Chair)

Alison Lowton

Peter Maddison

Sir Tony Redmond

Professor Paul Wiles CB

### LGBCE Officers Present:

Jolyon Jackson CBE

Lynn Ingram

Marcus Bowell

Tim Bowden

Richard Buck

Jo Porter

Lucy Ward

David Owen

Alex Hinds

Karen Cleverly

Chief Executive

Finance Director

Director of Strategy and Communications

Review Manager

Review Manager

Review Manager

Review Officer (item 5)

Review Officer (item 7)

Review Officer (item 6)

Business Support Officer (minutes)

## Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

## Declarations of interest

Peter Maddison declared an interest in Cambridgeshire, Jo Porter and Tim Bowden declared an interest in Chichester and Richard Buck declared an interest in Southwark. They took no part in the discussions of those items.

Additionally, Professor Colin Mellors noted that, as he was the lead Commissioner on the electoral reviews of Southwark and Cambridgeshire, those items would be chaired by Professor Paul Wiles.

## Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 15 December 2015

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 (16)01

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

He indicated explained that, in order to facilitate planning and diary management. Commissioners would now be allocated to reviews when the latter were added to the potential review programme.

He reported on meetings held including with Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The former was an agenda item and, in respect of the Isles of Scilly, the Commission would wait for further feedback before considering, in the summer whether to carry out an electoral review.

The Director of Strategy and Communications noted that from February, a broader set of equalities data would be included in pen portraits. He expected a first draft of the report by De Montfort University by the end of January and he noted that the Devolution Bill was about to receive Royal Assent after various amendments.

The Review Manager gave an update on the work being carried out by Southampton University. There would be a further update in February.

The forecasting methodology developed by the Policy & Research Officer was in the process of being peer reviewed and this would be concluded by the end of the month. The methodology was currently being tested.

The Finance Director had highlighted some initial findings of the process review at the last policy workshop. She would circulate the final proposed process after discussion with staff during February. It was agreed that the process review meeting would be held on 14 March at 1pm replacing the policy workshop in February. This would be confirmed with Commissioners, along with dates of policy workshops.

In future, it was envisaged that there would only be one Commission dinner each year, with DCLG. The tentative date for the 2016 dinner was confirmed as May.

It was agreed that, at the outset of a review, Lead Commissioners would receive three pieces of information; the pen portrait, an initial meeting proforma, and a review timetable.

## 2. Harrogate Council Size - LGBCE (16)02

It had been agreed to review Harrogate Borough Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 31 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 54 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 14 from 54 to 40 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 40 members.

### **Agreed**

The Commission agreed that a council size of 40 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

## 3. Chichester Council Size - LGBCE (16)03

It had been agreed to review Chichester Borough Council at the request of the local authority. According to the latest available electoral figures, 14 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 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 decrease by 12 from 48 to 36 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 36 members.

### **Agreed**

The Commission agreed that a council size of 36 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

#### 4. Newcastle upon Tyne Council Size - LGBCE (16)04

It had been agreed to review Newcastle upon Tyne City Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 35 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 78 members.

At its November meeting, the Commission had sought further information from groups on the Council given that, whilst there was some evidence pointing to a reduction in size, neither the case for a reduction nor for a retention of the existing size had put forward persuasive evidence. Subsequently, further written evidence had been produced and the Lead Commissioner and officials had visited the Council to discuss the matter.

The Review Manager and Lead Commissioner explained that a key emphasis of the additional evidence received from the Council was how it envisaged the role of the councillor going forward. In support, the Council had provided evidence detailing the community role that was expected of members and that casework was a key priority. Alternative evidence received, whilst suggesting that not all members were part of committees, did not detail how the role of members would be fulfilled in a representational context under a reduced council size. After careful consideration, officers had concluded that the Council had now made a persuasive case about the role it expected of members and that this was not achievable under a reduced council size. Officers and the Lead Commissioner were therefore satisfied that the argument made by the Council was persuasive for a council size of 78.

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 78 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 78 members.

#### **Agreed**

The Commission agreed that a council size of 78 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

#### 5. Southwark Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (16)05

*This item was chaired by Professor Paul Wiles.*

The review of Southwark Borough Council had commenced on 18 August 2015. According to the latest available electoral figures, 43 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 August 2015, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 63 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, five two-member and two 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 with amendments in the following areas:

- References to North East Southwark and North West Southwark to be transposed in the table.

**Agreed**

Draft Recommendations for Southwark Borough Council as modified.

## 6. Bexley Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (16)06

The review of Bexley London Borough Council had commenced on 18 August 2015. According to the latest available electoral figures, 10 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent. The Council had requested the Commission undertake a review with the aim to reduce council size.

At its meeting on 18 August 2015, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 45 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 11 three-member, five two-member and two 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 Bexley London Borough Council as presented.

## 7. Cambridgeshire - Final Recommendations for Cambridge City – LGBCE (16)07

*This item was chaired by Professor Paul Wiles.*

The review of Cambridgeshire County Council had commenced on 21 October 2014. According to the latest available electoral figures, 32 per cent of divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 October 2014, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 63. This was further reduced to 61 during development of the draft recommendations to provide for a better allocation between districts. The Commission subsequently, on 21 April 2015, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 253 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations. On 20 October 2015, the Commission agreed Final Recommendations for four of the five districts of Cambridgeshire and agreed to conduct further limited consultation in the Cambridge City area.

Following publication, a further 114 submissions had been received commenting on the further limited consultation in the Cambridge City area and these had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

During the development of the final recommendations an error had been discovered in the electorate count in the Abbey and Romsey areas which would result in Abbey division having a 16% electoral variance. This had necessitated a boundary modification between the proposed Abbey and Petersfield divisions. Accordingly, the boundary between these two divisions had been moved further south in order to achieve good electoral equality for Abbey division. The Commission was assured that there had been no representations made from within this area at any stage in the review, that ground detail was consistent with such a change and that, indeed, the revised boundary in this area coincided with part of a larger boundary that had been suggested at an earlier stage of the review.

The review team also proposed a minor amendment to the division boundary in the Arbury and Castle areas of the city to reflect the evidence received during consultation.

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 and during the further limited consultation.

In the Castle & Newham area where a two-member division was proposed, Commissioners were persuaded by evidence received that the area would be best served by two single-member divisions, accepting that this would create a variance of -12%.

In the Trumpington & Queen Edith's area, where a two-member division was proposed, submissions were received in support of two single-member divisions. It was noted that this would require either making substantial changes to Petersfield

division (in order to follow the railway line) which would be inconsistent with the support received for the latter area or follow Babraham Road where there had been no evidence in support of making this modification. An alternative approach was not possible without an unacceptable level of electoral inequality. Commissioners agreed that there was not persuasive evidence for splitting the area.

The Commission agreed the Final Recommendations as presented with amendments in the following areas:

- Castle and Newham area.

### **Agreed**

Final Recommendations for Cambridgeshire County Council – Cambridge City area as modified.

## 8. Cornwall – LGBCE (16)08

The Review Manager reported that the Chair and Chief Executive had met with the leader of Cornwall County Council on 5 January 2016 regarding the timing of the electoral review.

The meeting was positive and the County Council was keen to engage with the review, but had concerns with the review timetable proposed. As a result of the meeting officers recommended extending the review timetable as outlined in Appendix D of the report. An initial visit to the Council would be arranged in February or March. Subject to agreement, a press release would be released immediately.

### **Agreed.**

The revised timetable for the electoral review of Cornwall.

## 9. Coterminosity, Doughnut Wards and Accessibility – LGBCE (16)09

The Review Manager introduced the report and outlined the current policy.

Coterminosity was effectively a fourth criteria, but was not reported in a consistent fashion. He proposed that this was rectified in the guidance. The achievement rate of coterminosity on recent reviews was reported to be between 60% - 80%.

Officers considered that the existing practice of considering doughnut wards on a case by case basis was fit for purpose.

No changes to the approach on accessibility were proposed, but current policies, such as trying to use the rear of properties, would be reiterated.

### **Agreed**

There would be some minor amendments to the technical guidance to improve clarity in these areas.

## 10. Quarterly Review Programme Update – LGBCE (16)10

The Review Manager introduced the report which took account of the revised Cornwall timetable. There had been a request from Manchester to bring their review forward by two months and this had been incorporated.

Ashford had since requested that their review be reprogrammed to start in May. There were no concerns raised.

### **Agreed**

The changes to the timetable outlined in the paper.

## 11. Chair's Report

Most items had already been discussed under item 1. The Chair asked for update from the Chief Executive on the re-appointment of a Commissioner and progress on the appointment of the Deputy Chair. The Chief Executive reported that there had been no further progress but that he would pursue again during the week.

The Chair mentioned that he would attend the LGA Conference later in the year.

A new member of the Audit & Risk Committee was needed as the Chair was no longer eligible to be a member. Peter Maddison volunteered for the position. He was seconded by Professor Paul Wiles and duly elected.

### **Agreed**

Peter Maddison would be a member of the Audit & Risk Committee.

## 12. Chief Executive's Report

- Pay Award  
The Chief Executive reported that a 1% across the board pay offer had been made to the union and members had accepted, but under protest. The Commission agreed to implement the pay award from 1 April 2016.
- Dates of Commission Meetings  
It was suggested that the August meeting would be moved to 9 August 2016 so that the lead Commissioner for several reports due on that date could attend. To be confirmed after the meeting.

## 13. Finance Director's Report – Quarter 3 Projections – LGBCE (16)11

The Finance Director introduced the quarter three year end finance projections. They projected a year end underspend of £41,000 which included some additional expenditure on monitors and laptops of around £6,000.

There was still a risk relating to a concluded tribunal case for a former employee. The Review Manager explained that a decision on whether there would be any liability was expected very soon. There was likely to be an appeal.

Payments had successfully been made under the new government banking arrangements.

The year-end accounts and annual report work had commenced. NAO had recently carried out a walkthrough of financial controls in order to frame their audit work. They would be conducting an interim final accounts audit in mid-February for two weeks and a final accounts audit in mid-May for two weeks.

The Audit Committee would, in February, consider the contents of this year's Governance statement and proposals around the annual account format and inclusions. It would hopefully approve the draft accounts in May and recommend the final accounts in June to the Commission for approval. Publication of the Annual Report was needed by the end of June which was earlier than last year.

#### 14. Future Business – LGBCE (16)12

The results of the appraisals process had been due to be reported to the meeting. A new appraisals system was to be proposed. A report on both will be brought to the February meeting.

#### AOB

The Review Manager requested feedback on digital mapping following the introduction of the new GIS system. There were currently some issues with the iPad application. The software had been tested on the recent tour of East Sussex where it was found to be easier to find specific roads.

#### **Agreed**

To carry on with the current work and to trial the story maps.

The Chair indicated that the start time of future Commission meetings may be reviewed to remove the necessity for overnight accommodation for some Commissioners. There would be no change for the next few months.

#### **Close of Business 12:30**

