

BCFE (08) 6th Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on Monday 30 April 2008
at 10.30am at Trevelyan House, 30 Great Peter
Street, London, SW1P 2HW

Present:

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

Also present:

Archie Gall	Director
Tim Kershaw	Review Manager
Tim Atkinson	Senior Adviser
Tim Bowden	Review Officer
Arion Lawrence	Review Officer
Kalim Anwer	Review Officer
Jessica Metherringham	Review Officer
James Ansell	Review Officer
Paul Kingsley	Review Adviser
Sam Hartley	Review Manager
Alison Wildig	Review Manager
Gennoria Miles	Business Assistant (minutes)

Apologies:

Louise Footner	Lawyer
Claire Sherer	Regional Liaison Officer – South of England

1. Opening remarks

1.1 The Chairman welcomed James Ansell to his first Committee meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting: 7 April 2008 BCFE (08) 5th Meeting

2.1 The minutes of the meeting were approved.

3. Matters arising

3.1 Matters arising were to be covered as part of the agenda.

4. West Sussex: council size – Report by Review Officer – BCFE (08) 05

4.1 The Review Officer briefed the Committee on the two council size proposals received for West Sussex County Council . The first, from the county council was for a council size of one, to 71 councillors. The only other proposal had been received from former county councillor, for a council size of 76.

4.2 The Committee noted that the county council's proposal for an extra councillor had largely been argued on the grounds of actual and forecast increases in electorate in different parts of the county. The council had taken the view that there should be no reduction in the level of representation in any district and had therefore proposed that the electoral imbalances be addressed by increasing by one the number of county councillors to be returned from Horsham.

4.3 In considering the proposal for a council size of 76 from the former county councillor, the Committee concluded there was little compelling evidence in support of such a number.

4.4 The Director reminded the Committee that an increase in electorate was not in itself sufficient justification for an increase in council size. This was clearly set out in the Committee's guidance to stakeholders. The Committee agreed. It also considered it unfortunate that neither of the proponents of council size proposals had sought to consider the issue from first principles. Instead, they had simply built on the existing council size.

4.5 The Committee requested that these issues about starting from first principles be addressed in future versions of its guidance. In the meantime it noted that the county council was a high performing

authority whose political management structure clearly appeared to work well. It therefore agreed to use the county council's proposal of 71 councillors as a starting point in considering an electoral scheme.

5 Shropshire : council size – Report by Review Officer – BCFE (08) 06

- 5.1 The Review Officer briefed the Committee on the submission from Shropshire County Council for a council size of 75 councillors.
- 5.2 The Committee noted that the county council had included in its submission a matrix setting out a number of scenarios relating to the future roles of councillors and the functions which might be delegated to them. This pointed to a range of council sizes. The fact that the council had arrived at a council size of 75 members (as opposed to the 96 members referred to in the unitary bid to the Secretary of State) suggested that a realistic and pragmatic appraisal of councillor roles and responsibilities had been undertaken.
- 5.3 The Committee agreed that, for the purposes of considering electoral schemes, a council size of around 75 councillors should be used. However, the Committee asked that the minutes record it had not been persuaded by the county council's argument in favour of an odd number of councillors.

6 Wiltshire: council size – Report by Review Officer – BCFE (08) 07

- 6.1 Professor Ron Johnston declared an interest in the Wiltshire review and took no part in the Committee's deliberations.
- 6.2 The Review Officer briefed the Committee on the two council size proposals for received for the new authority of Wiltshire. The first, from Wiltshire County Council, was for a council size of 98 members. The second, from a local resident, was for a council size of 101 members. The Review Officer tabled a letter received from the county council providing further information in support of its proposed council size.
- 6.3 The Committee did not feel that enough evidence was submitted to support the proposal for 98 members; it considered the number necessary would probably be within the range of 70-110 discussed by the council but could not see the direct link to 98. More evidence in support of this proposal should be sought by officers before any decision could be made. The Committee noted the council size of 98 councillors had been included in the county council's unitary bid to the Secretary of State (with no clear rationale for it) and questioned whether the county council had simply worked back from this number in seeking to justify it.

- 6.4 In relation to the resident's proposal for 101 councillors, the Committee noted that it had not been supported by any evidence about the roles or responsibilities of councillors within the new unitary authority. Additionally, he had proposed basing new electoral arrangement on 14 community areas, as opposed to the 20 areas being planned for the new unitary authority. In the circumstances, the Committee decided it was not minded to pursue the resident's proposal.
- 6.5 The Committee noted that the need to seek further information had put the review timetable at risk. Unless, this slippage could be recovered there was a real risk that the Electoral Commission would be unable to implement the Committee's recommendations in time for elections in May 2009. In that event, the May 2009 elections would be held on the basis of the county council's existing electoral arrangements.

7 Cornwall: council size – Report by Review Adviser – BCFE (08) 08

- 7.1 The Review Adviser distributed further documentation received from One Cornwall on 29 April 2008. He briefed the Committee on the proposals for council size. There were proposals for 90, 110, 130, 135 and 164 members for the new council.
- 7.2 The Committee considered that insufficient evidence had been received for council sizes of 110, 135 and 164 and decided not to pursue them. It also noted that the arguments used to justify the 135-member scheme were similar to those of the 130. The Committee recognised the support locally for the council size of 130 and that there was limited evidence provided for that size and that of 90.
- 7.3 The Committee concluded that further information was required on the community networks and their roles under the 130-member proposal. In addition, it was concerned that the proposal for 90 members had not been consulted on or how they were arrived at, and did not clearly reflect the proposed political management structure.
- 7.4 The Committee asked that further evidence be sought for both the 130 and 90 member council sizes and that meetings with the proponents of both be arranged as a matter of priority. It agreed that, given the time constraints for reaching conclusions on the Cornwall council size, decisions should be delegated to Chair in consultation with the two Deputy Commissioners with a particular interest in the review.

8 Structural reviews update – oral report

- 8.1 The Review Officer for Devon updated the Committee on the progress of the Devon structural review. More meetings with Devon authorities had been arranged for 6 and 7 May 2008.
- 8.2 The Review Officer for Suffolk updated the Committee on the progress of the Suffolk structural review. Meetings in the county had been arranged for 8 and 14 May 2008
- 8.3 The Director informed the Committee that the Chair, the Review Manager (Norfolk and Suffolk) and he had met a number of Suffolk and Norfolk MPs on 29 April 2008.
- 8.4 The Senior Adviser updated the Committee on the Norfolk structural review. South Norfolk and Broadland had both requested further meetings.
- 8.5 The Committee discussed the arrangements to hold round table discussions on 12 May with a wide range of voluntary, business and other interests in the Gt Yarmouth/Waveney area.

9 Boundary Committee agreed meeting dates

- 9.1 15 May 2008 Meeting to discuss responses to questions on structural concepts
- 21 May 2008 Meeting to discuss structural draft proposals – Ron Johnston requested that Devon be covered first on the agenda
- 27 May 2008 Meeting to discuss electoral review schemes

10 Any other business

- 10.1 Jane Earl advised that she was unable to attend the Boundary Committee meeting on 19 June 2008.

11 Next meeting

- 11.1 The next scheduled meeting of the Committee will be on 15 May 2008 and at the Beauchamp Hotel, Russell Square starting at 9:30am. The meeting will be preceded by a working dinner the previous evening, 14 May 2008 at the Park Inn Hotel.

**The Boundary Committee for England
May 2008**