

LGBCE (10) 9th Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 8 December 2010, at
11.30am, Rich Mix Cultural Foundation, 35-47 Bethnal
Green Road, London, E1 6LA

Commissioners Present:

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

Officers 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 (item 7)
Jessica Metheringham-Owlett	Review Officer (item 4)
Sarah Murphy	Review Officer (item 3)
Will Morrison	Review Officer (item 5)
Kathleen Peacock	Business Support Officer (Minutes)

1. Minutes from LGBCE's meeting on 9 November 2010 and Matters Arising

The Commissioners introduced themselves and welcomed new Commissioner, Dr Colin Sinclair, to his first meeting.

The minutes from the 9 November 2010 meeting were agreed as an accurate record subject to agreed amendments. 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 Jane Earl registered a new interest in the Rich Mix Cultural Foundation.
- 2.5 Max Caller declared an existing interest in Hertfordshire and the London Borough of Brent.
- 2.6 Colin Sinclair declared a new interest in Cumbria.
- 2.7 David Hewitt declared an existing interest in Rushmoor.

3. Chair's Report

3.1 Schedule of Parliamentary Meetings - LGBCE (10)88

3.1.1. The Chair reported that, as part of the Commission's communications strategy, regular meetings were taking place with MPs whose constituencies were subject to electoral reviews, or where Orders had been laid in Parliament. Such meetings had taken place with MPs for Buckinghamshire, East Cheshire, Rushmoor, Hart and Daventry during November and December. The meetings had been well received by the MPs. Further meetings have been scheduled for December and January and a follow-up meeting with the MP for Daventry had been arranged.

3.1.2. The Chair had also met to discuss strategic issues around the Order making process with members of the Speaker's Committee, Lord Harris of Haringey and Earl Cathcart. Clive Betts MP, Chair of the CLG Select Committee, had proposed an informal briefing session for the Committee on the Commission's work.

3.2 Parliamentary Questions to LGBCE - LGBCE (10)89

3.2.1. Two PQs had been put forward to the Speaker's Committee relating to the work of the LGBCE.

3.2.2. The Chair had attended the answering of the oral Question, observing from the officials' box. He had found the session worthwhile and informative.

3.3 LGBCE Freedom of Information Requests – November 2010 - LGBCE (10)90

3.2.1. One FOI request has been received in November.

3.4 Commissioner Appointments

- 3.4.1. Two new appointments have now been made to the Commission - Dr Colin Sinclair and Professor Paul Wiles. A third new appointment was expected in January.
- 3.4.2. Professor Colin Mellors had now been designated as the Commission's Deputy Chair.
- 3.4.3. Dr Peter Knight had been reappointed for a further term.
- 3.4.4. Joan Jones' appointment as Commission would come to an end at the end of December.

4. Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive gave the following update to the Commission.

Noted:

- 4.1 The Chief Executive, Communications and Public Affairs Manager and the Chair were due to attend a meeting with the LGA Leadership Board that afternoon. The Board had been invited to provide feedback on the LGBCE's consultation documents.
 - 4.2 RSM Tenon would be undertaking several Internal Audits over the next few weeks and looking at Governance, Risk Maturity and the LGBCE's Financial Controls, the results of which will be presented to the February Audit Committee.
 - 4.3 National Audit Office (NAO) had started their annual Value for Money study. The results of the Study would be discussed with Commission and reported to the Speaker's Committee in February 2011.
 - 4.4 SMT had reviewed and was in the process of updating the LGBCE's KPIs, as recommended by the Speaker's Committee.
 - 4.5 The Commission discussed the current templates for council size and draft recommendations and agreed that these templates should be standardised for all reviews.
- Agreed;
- 4.6 That a workshop would be set up to discuss the production of a standardised report template.

5. Surrey council size - LGBCE (10)80

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

Noted:

- 5.1 The electoral review of Surrey was triggered as 36% of wards have electoral variances over 10% from the average.
- 5.2 Surrey County Council has 80 elected members and the Council proposed retaining its current council size. This was based primarily on the higher than average electorate per councillor, compared to the national average.

Agreed:

5.3 After considering the submissions, the Commission was minded to recommend retaining the Council's current size of 80 members, for the purposes of the next stage of the review.

6. Oxfordshire council size - LGBCE (10)81

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

Noted:

- 6.1 The Oxfordshire electoral review was triggered because one of its wards had an electoral variance of 35% above the average for the county as a whole.
- 6.2 The submission received from the County Council, supported by all three groups on the council, proposed reducing its council size from 74 to 63 or 64 members.
- 6.3 The review team noted that a council size of 64 would enable a slightly better councillor: elector ratio across the county than a council size of 63.
- 6.4 It was noted that the County Council's provisional forecast predicts that the population of the Oxford City area will increase by up to 11% over the next six years.
- 6.5 South Oxfordshire District Council had also requested a review and, in discussions with its Chief Executive, some concerns had been expressed about the provisional electorate figures for the district submitted by Oxfordshire County Council.

Agreed;

- 6.6 That the approach to council size taken by the County Council was compatible with that taken by the Commission in its recently published consultation paper.
- 6.7 After considering the submissions, the Commission was minded to recommend reducing council size to 64 members for the next stage of the review.
- 6.8 The review team will liaise with Oxfordshire County Council over forecast electorates.

7. Buckinghamshire council size – LGBCE (10)82

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

Noted:

- 7.1 The Buckinghamshire electoral review had been triggered as 30% of the area's divisions have electoral variances of more than 10% compared with the average for the county as a whole. The county has a mixture of both single member and two member wards.

7.2 Twenty-two submissions had been received to date, including one from the County Council proposing a decrease in council size from 57 to 49. This would enable the County to have uniform single member pattern. However there was not cross party support for single member wards.

Agreed:

7.3 That the approach to council size taken by the County Council was compatible with that taken by the Commission in its recently published consultation paper.

7.4 After considering the submissions, the Commission was minded to recommend reducing council size for Buckinghamshire from 57 to 49 councillors for the purposes of the next stage of the review.

7.5 That Buckinghamshire County Council would be contacted to clarify if the submission received is a formal request to change to a single member division pattern.

8. Cumbria council size – LGBCE (10)83

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

Noted:

8.1 The Cumbria electoral review has been triggered as Cumbria has one division with an electoral variance greater than 35% from the average for the county and 30% of its divisions have a variance of 10% from the average.

8.2 To date, 37 submissions had been received including one from John Stevenson MP. The County currently has 84 members and the submissions received proposed council sizes of between 60 – 65. However, the County Council proposed retaining the current 84 councillors.

8.3 A reduction in council size had been put forward by the Council's Executive in March 2010, but had been subject to call-in, and the decision was subsequently overturned. Discussions were to have taken place between the County Council and District Councils in the area on the issue of council size but the current position was unclear.

8.4 In their proposal, the County Council had stressed the sparseness of the area's population and the difficult topography of the area which inhibited easy travel for councillors

Agreed:

8.5 After considering the submissions, the Commission decided to defer its decision on Cumbria County Council's size until the February 2011 Commission meeting, since it was not satisfied that sufficient evidence had been provided in support of retaining the existing number of 84 Councillors.

9. Hart council size – LGBCE (10)84

The Commission reviewed the council size submissions for Hart District Council.

Noted:

- 9.1. The Hart electoral review had been triggered as one of its wards has an electoral variance of 34% from the average electorate figure for the district.
- 9.2. Five submissions had been received proposing council sizes of either 42 or 33. Hart District Council currently has 35 Councillors and had proposed this be reduced to 33.

Agreed;

- 9.3. That the approach to council size taken by the District Council was compatible with that taken by the Commission in its recently published consultation paper.
- 9.4. After considering the submissions, the Commission was minded to recommend reducing Hart District Council's council size from 35 to 33 members for the purposes of the next stage of the review.

10. North Somerset District Council related alterations – LGBCE (10)85

The Commission reviewed the related alterations proposal for North Somerset District Council.

Noted:

- 10.1. North Somerset District Council meets the review criteria of having 30% of wards with a 10% electoral variance. However there has been insufficient time to carry out the review prior to the next round of elections. Due to these circumstances the necessity of undertaking the proposed related alterations was discussed.
- 10.2. The Commission raised concern that ward boundaries could be changed twice in a short space of time, leading to confusion for residents and a departure from standard LGBCE practices.

Agreed;

- 10.3. That the Commission would make the related alterations order. However North Somerset District Council would need to be made aware that after the May 2011 elections a full electoral review would be required which could alter the boundaries covered by the related alterations order.
- 10.4. The Commission requested officers report to the next meeting setting out a clear policy position on related alterations where this would give rise to electoral imbalances which would trigger or exacerbate a need for a further electoral review.

11. Finance Progress Report

The Director of Finance circulated a paper entitled 'Resource Expenditure 2010/11 – First 8 Months' and then gave the following update.

Noted:

- 11.1. A Finance Manual containing comprehensive details of the LGBCE's financial procedures and general information has been produced as a staff handbook for use by LGBCE staff. A staff briefing session has also taken place to ensure all staff are aware of what information can be found within the Finance Manual. Copies of the Finance Manual are available on request for Commissioners.
- 11.2. The LGBCE's original budget for 2010/11 was £2,845,000 which was based on predicted spending costs whilst the LGBCE was part of the EC. Since April 2010 the LGBCE has been able to produce more accurate spending figures based on actual operational and staffing costs throughout the year.
- 11.3. HM Treasury and Speaker's Committee were made aware in October that an underspend for the year was predicted. Since then the underspend had increased, although further work was needed to confirm the likely year-end outturn.
- 11.4. Contact would be made with HM Treasury representatives in January 2011 to discuss the LGBCE's latest forecast outturn and underspend.
- 11.5. By then the EC's start up costs, proposed for write-off and included in the above forecast, will have been subject to audit.
- 11.6. Sensible investments in areas that will provide long term savings are advised for the remainder of the 2010/11 financial year.

Agreed:

- 11.7. The Director of Finance would circulate the presented figures to the Commission electronically, with the full year budget breakdown added.

12. Future Business – LGBCE (10)86

The Future Business paper was considered by the Commission.

Noted:

- 12.1. The Commissioners availability for the proposed meeting dates of 11 January 2011 and 12 July 2011 were discussed.
- 12.2. The difficulties of booking Commission meeting dates and the importance retaining all booked dates was then discussed.
- 12.3. A change of meeting pattern dates was suggested for 2012, so that Commission meetings fell on the 3rd Tuesday of each month for 2012.

Agreed;

- 12.4. That the next Commission meeting would take place in the afternoon of 11 January 2011, after new Commissioner inductions in the morning.

- 12.5. New Commissioners Dr Colin Sinclair and Professor Paul Wiles would attend a training session in the morning of 11 January. Details of the training session would be forwarded, once all arrangements had been confirmed.
- 12.6. The suggested 2012 Commission meeting timetable would be compiled as early as possible in 2011 and would be submitted to the Commission for discussion and agreement.
- 12.7. All Commissioners are to make the Business and Committee Services Manager aware of any dates that they cannot make in 2012.

13. Operational Report – LGBCE (10)87

The Director of Reviews gave an update on the Operational Report and the Review Risk Register, covering the LGBCE's Operational Risks.

Noted:

- 13.1. The allocation of reviews to Commissioners' was discussed.
- 13.2. The consultation period for the new review procedures has been running since 18 November and emails have been sent to all local authorities and other relevant organisations inviting them to participate.
- 13.3. The response received to the consultation documents so far has been a small and considered one. Papers analysing the final results will be produced for the next Commission meetings.

Agreed;

- 13.2. That Jane Earl would remain the Lead Commissioner for the Cumbria review until January 2011, when the review will be re-allocated.
- 13.3. The two reviews allocated to the Commission Chair as an interim arrangement would be re-allocated in the New Year.

14. AOB

The Commission expressed its deep thanks to Joan Jones for her dedication in her role as a LGBCE Commissioner and EC Deputy Commissioner over the last eight years, which had been greatly appreciated.

Agreed;

- 14.1. A farewell dinner will be held in the New Year to celebrate Joan Jones' achievements as an LGBCE Commissioner and EC Deputy Commissioner.

13.30 Meeting Closed