

LGBCE (16)10th Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 18th October 2016, at 11.30am, in Meeting Room, Floor 29, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP

Commissioners Present

Professor Colin Mellors (Chair)
Sir Tony Redmond (Deputy Chair)
Peter Knight CBE
Alison Lowton
Peter Maddison QPM
Professor Paul Wiles CB

LGBCE Officers Present:

Jolyon Jackson CBE	Chief Executive
Lynn Ingram	Director of Finance
Marcus Bowell	Director of Strategy & Communications
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Jo Porter	Review Manager
Lucy Dunkeyson	Review Manager
Paul Kingsley	Review Officer (item 6)
Emily Starkie	Review Officer (item 7)
Dan Carlsson-Hyslop	Review Officer (item 8)
David Owen	Review Officer (items 9 & 11)
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (item 10)
Karen Cleverly	Business Support Officer (minutes)
Carissa Edwards	Office Manager

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Declarations of interest

Alison Lowton declared an interest in item 2, Rotherham, and took no part in the discussions of that item.

Professor Colin Mellors declared an interest in item 7, Leeds. He took no part in the discussions of that item which was chaired by Sir Tony Redmond.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 20 September 2016

The minutes were agreed as a correct record, and were signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

Alison Lowton enquired whether the Director of Strategy and Communications had circulated the briefing note in relation to the parliamentary boundary reviews (item 1 of September minutes). He advised that he would check and, if appropriate, re-circulate the document.

1. Operational Report - LGBCE (16)108

The Chief Executive presented the Operational Report for October.

He reported on the outcome of recent meetings to Scarborough & Richmondshire Councils and it was recommended that electoral reviews of both Councils be added to the review programme. The Chair and he were meeting with Forest Heath Council the following day.

Cornwall Council had formally requested a minor delay in their overall review schedule to allow the new Council to settle in following the 2017 elections before the start of the boundary phase of the review. Commissioners accepted that the request was reasonable and agreed to the delay. The Chair would write accordingly to the Leader of the Council.

Commissioners noted the remainder of the report and the work programme as shown.

Agreed

To delay the overall review period for Cornwall Council by three months.

2. Rotherham Council Size – LGBCE (16)109

It had been agreed to review Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council alongside the DCLG-instigated work being undertaken to strengthen the governance and service delivery arrangements of the Council. According to the latest available electoral figures, five per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with one ward, Wath, having a variance of 12 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 63 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representational arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that, at this point, there was insufficient evidence to agree a council size. Specifically, it was judged that the submission that had been put forward by the Council did not fully evidence the proposed council size of 59 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and agreed that further information was required from the Council before making a decision on council size. It was also noted that a public consultation on council size might be appropriate if the information presented by the Council remained insufficient for the Commission to reach a decision.

It was also noted that the DCLG-appointed Commissioners who were currently assisting Rotherham MBC had indicated that they felt unable to comment on this matter. The Commission expressed its disappointment at this aspect.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that:

- The lead Commissioner would seek a further meeting with Rotherham Council
- Consideration would be given to carrying out a public consultation on council size if further information from the Council was deemed to be inconclusive

3. Harborough Council Size – LGBCE (16)110

It had been agreed to review Harborough District Council. According to the latest available electoral figures, 44 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent. Also, the Council had requested a review.

The current size of the Council is 37 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 from 37 to 34 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 34 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 34 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

4. Tendring Council Size – LGBCE (16)111

It had been agreed to review Tendring District Council at the request of the local authority. According to the latest available electoral figures, 11 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 60 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 60 to 48 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 48 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 48 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

5. Cornwall Draft Council Submission – LGBCE (16)112

The Commission had received a draft progress report from Cornwall Council on the development of its council size submission (due early next year). They had also received the Governance Review report that had been produced by an external advisor group.

The Commission discussed the material that had been provided and agreed to write to the Council to thank them for their work and to outline key observations. It was noted, in particular, that there would be an expectation that the next iteration (due mid-December) would be clearly informed by the report of the Governance group.

Agreed

The Commission agreed:

- To write to Cornwall Council outlining key observations on the work so far..
- To seek a meeting with the Chair of the Governance Review.

6 South Norfolk Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (16)113

The review of South Norfolk District Council had commenced on 21 June 2016. According to the latest available electoral figures, 22 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with one ward, Old Costessey, being over 30 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 June 2016, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 46 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 4 three-, 11 two-, and 12 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 South Norfolk District Council as presented.

7. Leeds Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (16)114

The review of Leeds City Council had commenced on 23 February 2016. According to the latest available electoral figures, 9 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with one ward, City and Hunslet, projected to have 77 per cent more than average by 2022.

At its meeting on 23 February 2016, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 99 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 33 three-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 Leeds City Council as presented.

8. Huntingdonshire Final Recommendations - LGBCE (16)115

The review of Huntingdonshire District Council had commenced on 15 December 2015. According to the latest available electoral figures, 28 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with one ward, St Neots Priory Park, being over 30 per cent.

At its meeting on 15 December 2015, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 52 and had subsequently, on 17 May 2016, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 35 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

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.

It discussed in detail the areas of St Neots and the Hemmingfords. In these areas, whilst persuasive evidence had been received about community identity the resulting extremely high electoral variances would be have been unacceptable.

Given the strength of the community identity evidence, the team had looked very carefully at various ways of accommodating both community and electoral equality criteria but had been unable to find an way of doing so that would better reflect the Commission's statutory criteria. Taking all of the submissions into account, it was felt that there was insufficient evidence, therefore, to move away from the Draft Recommendations.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 8 three-, 10 two-, and 8 single-member wards in total with one ward name change.

The Commission therefore agreed the Final Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Final Recommendations for Huntingdonshire District Council as presented.

9. Newcastle Upon Tyne Final Recommendations - LGBCE (16)116

The review of Newcastle City Council had commenced on 19 January 2016. According to the latest available electoral figures, 35 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 19 January 2016, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 78 and had subsequently, on 17 May 2016, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 48 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations in some aspects and these changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations put to the Commission for consideration.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 26 three-member wards in total.

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.

It agreed the Final Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Final Recommendations for Newcastle City Council as presented.

10. Redbridge Final Recommendations - LGBCE (16)117

The review of London Borough of Redbridge Council had commenced on 17 November 2015. According to the latest available electoral figures, 33 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 17 November 2015, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 63 and had subsequently, on 20 May 2016, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 75 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations in some aspects and these changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations put to the Commission for consideration.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 19 three- and 3 two-member wards in total.

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.

It agreed the Final Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Final Recommendations for London Borough of Redbridge Council as presented.

11. Bexley Final Recommendations - LGBCE (16)118

The review of London Borough of Bexley 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.

At its meeting on 18 August 2015, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 45 and had subsequently, on 19 January 2016, agreed Draft Recommendations.

At its meeting on 19 July 2016, the Commission agreed the Final Recommendations for the majority of the borough but agreed to undertake further consultation focusing on the areas of Erith, Northend & Slade Green, Northumberland Heath and Barnehurst. Further Draft Recommendations for these areas were subsequently published.

Following publication, 26 submissions had been received commenting on the Further Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all the submissions into account, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Further Draft Recommendations in two areas to provide more clearly defined ward boundaries that would ensure good electoral equality. These changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations put to the Commission for consideration.

The Final Recommendations for the borough as a whole proposed a pattern of 11 three and six two-member wards in total.

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 and the Further Draft Recommendations.

It agreed the Final Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Final Recommendations for London Borough of Bexley Council as presented.

12. Chair's Report

It was agreed that the Chair should contact the Speaker's Committee if there was no immediate progress on the appointment of new Commissioners.

He thanked those who had organised the staff and Commissioner training session on Equalities & Diversity which had been held on 13 October. As follow-up, it had been agreed to carry out full equality impact assessments on:

- The overall process of carrying out electoral reviews
- Consultation methods.

These would be added to the actions log.

Finally, the Chair reported on his meeting with the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales earlier in the month and his meeting with the Kirklees Democracy Commission.

13. Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive had nothing further to report.

14. Finance Director's Report – Quarter 2 Projections – LGBCE (16)119

The Finance Director presented the second quarter financial projections for 2016/17. The report projected an underspend of £77,000 (or four per cent) which was within the key performance indicator target of six per cent for budget expenditure. She was confident that the figure was reasonable and, if necessary, she would take action in the third quarter. The main reason for the underspend was the previous shortage of review officers and the knock-on effect of not progressing certain business plan projects as a result. The new staff were now in place so the spend would pick up. The Finance Director had no current plans to spend against the capital budget, but she may decide to do so later in the year.

Members asked about the small underspend on Commissioners in relation to being two Commissioners down. The Finance Director clarified that she expected the spend to be around £9-10,000 per month for the remainder of the year and that additional costs were expected to be incurred this year for the new Independent Advisor to the Audit Committee. There was always a one-month backlog because claims were paid in arrears.

Progress on the report from Professor Colin Copus was raised. The Chief Executive would bring an update to the next Commission meeting.

It was noted that a Commissioner steering group for the next relocation project would be established, probably in the period January to March 2017.

It was suggested that it might be helpful to consider temporary staffing resources (including interns) as a cost-effective way of pursuing some discrete aspects of the business plan.

The Chief Executive agreed to bring the business plan to the next Commission meeting.

Agreed

The Chief Executive would bring the following to the next meeting:

- An update on the report from Professor Colin Copus
- The business plan.

15. Future Business – LGBCE (16)120

The future business of the Commission was noted.

The policy workshop in November was confirmed as going ahead on 15th November immediately following the Commission meeting although the precise time was still to be confirmed. The agenda would include an item on Periodic Electoral Reviews.

AOB

Following his appointment as Biometrics Commissioner, Professor Paul Wiles indicated that he would be writing to the Secretary of State to resign from the Commission. Although, he had continued in both roles in order to assist the Commission, this period had been longer than envisaged and the demands of the other position meant that he would now need to stand down. He had hoped that new Commissioners would have been formally appointed before he left.

The Chair expressed his thanks to Professor Wiles on behalf of the Commission both for his invaluable work during his time with the Commission and, specifically, for being willing to stay on for a few months in the hope of the new Commissioners being appointed.

It was agreed to identify an occasion to express the Commission's thanks for his service.

Close of Business 14:33.

Colt Kelly 15/11/16