

## BCFE (09) 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 2 March 2009, in the Boothroyd Room in Trevelyan House, Great Peter Street, London, SW1P 2HW

Present:

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

Also present:

Archie Gall	Director
Andrew Scallan	Director of Electoral Administration and Boundaries
Elizabeth Morrow	Senior Lawyer
Martin House	Consultant (Items 2 and 9)
Alex Robertson	Head of Media and Public Affairs (Item 8)
Vera Markos	Head of Strategy/Secretary to the Commission (Item 9)
Alison Wildig	Review Manager
Sam Hartley	Review Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager (Item 3 and 4)
Paul Kingsley	Review Adviser (Item 3)
Jessica Metherringham	Review Officer (Item 4)
Tim Bowden	Review Officer (Items 5-8)
Kalim Anwer	Review Officer (Items 5-8)
William Morrison	Review Officer (Items 5-8)
Megan Bayford	Review Assistant

## **1. Minutes of meetings on 2, 10 and 18 February 2009**

- 1.1 With minor amendments to the minutes of 18 February, the minutes of the last three Committee meetings were agreed.

## **2. Draft project plan for the transfer of the Boundary Committee – BCFE (09) 08**

- 2.1 Martin House presented a paper on a draft project plan for the transfer of the Boundary Committee out of the Electoral Commission, as proposed in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction (LDEDEC) Bill. He said that the project plan was very much a first draft, compiled following discussions with the Commission's Director of Electoral Administration and Boundaries and Director of Finance and Facilities, and the Director of the Committee. The timelines set out in the plan would change as the project moved forward.
- 2.2 The Committee raised general questions about the timetable, including the need to consult the Secretary of State over the draft transfer scheme.
- 2.3 The Chair reported on his regular meetings with the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Electoral Commission over the provisions of the Bill and the transfer of the Boundary Committee. He and the Chair of the Electoral Commission would each be responding to recent correspondence from the Minister for Local Government over the transfer.
- 2.4 The Director of Electoral Administration and Boundaries reported on the meeting he and the Director of the Committee had held with the Clerk to the Speaker's Committee over the appointments and draft negative resolution processes set out in the Bill. In relation to the latter, the Committee agreed on the general point that preserving the integrity of the review and implementation process was more important than 'who' implements recommendations.
- 2.5 The Committee agreed that the Chair should take the lead in discussions with DCLG, officers and stakeholders taking the transfer scheme forward, updating the Committee on a regular basis.

## **3. Cornwall electoral review – consideration of review & timetable – BCFE (09) 09**

- 3.1 The Review Manager presented a paper for the Committee to consider its options on the Cornwall electoral review in light of the Secretary of State's decision not to defer the county's June 2009 elections and to base them on the Committee's draft recommendations.

- 3.2 The Director reported that he and the Commission's Director of Electoral Administration and Boundaries had attended a meeting at DCLG the previous week with representatives of One Cornwall, the Association of Electoral Administrators, SOLACE Electoral Matters Panel and MOJ to discuss the Secretary of State's announcement, and planning for the June elections. It was clear that all One Cornwall's resources would, necessarily, be focussed on the elections rather than the review.
- 3.3 In the circumstances the Director felt it would not be appropriate to ask for further information from the Cornwall Implementation Executive (IE) at this time. It was noted that the Committee had yet to receive any mapping from the Implementation Executive as part of its Stage 3 submission. The Director said that the priority of council officers would be on ensuring the new arrangements are in place for the elections and the best option would be to extend the Cornwall electoral review timetable.
- 3.4 The Committee agreed it would not be in the best interests of the people of Cornwall to either stop the review entirely or to re-start it at a later date. It was agreed that the review should continue to its conclusion after the June election. The Chair asked the review team to prepare a new timetable for the review and report to the next meeting.

#### **4. Consideration of council size – Durham – BCFE (09) 10**

- 4.1 The Review Officer presented a paper enclosing the latest submission from Durham County Council regarding council size for the new Durham unitary authority. The Committee recognised that the authority had made some progress since its original council size submission, which was considered by the Committee in October 2008. In particular, it was clear that the authority had given consideration to alternative council size options and had undertaken a more detailed analysis of the roles and workload of councillors. There was also a greater emphasis in the council's submission of elected members' representational role within the new authority. The Committee also noted that the authority's proposed council size had been the subject of scrutiny as part of its wider local consultation on area action partnerships.
- 4.2 The Committee therefore confirmed its acceptance of a council size of 126. The next stage of consultation on wider electoral arrangements was due to start on 17 March 2009.
- 4.3 The Committee expressed a wish for the future that there be further discussion and exploration regarding the criteria by which it determines council size. It was recognised that this maybe a role for the new organisation once the Committee's functions are transferred from the Electoral Commission.

#### **5. Draft further proposal report – Devon – BCFE (09) 11**

5.1 Before commencing with discussion of the specific county papers, the Committee raised a number of general points on the further draft proposal reports.

5.2 In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Reports too long in length would be difficult for the general public to digest.
- The reports needed to contain as much, if not more, information about the patterns being consulted on as the draft proposal reports published last summer, and self-contained.
- It should be emphasised that this consultation is supplementary/complementary to previous consultations and all previous representations will be taken into account by the Committee.
- The Committee is primarily seeking evidence where it has identified 'gaps' in information about specific patterns.
- Presentation of the patterns should not be comparative, but neutral yet qualified.
- Semi-quantitative language should be avoided.

5.3 In discussion, the Committee made some comments on the Devon report which it asked be carried over to the Norfolk and Suffolk reports.

## **6. Draft further proposal report – Suffolk – BCFE (09) 12**

6.1 The Committee made a number of specific comments on the content of the report.

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

## **8. Structural review communications strategy – BCFE (09) 14**

8.1 The Commission's Head of Media and Public Affairs presented a paper on a communication strategy for the structural reviews.

8.2 The Committee discussed its strategy for meetings and agreed on three county-wide meetings to be conducted in Norfolk, Suffolk and Devon on dates to be confirmed in late April.

**9. Corporate governance review – BCFE (09) 15**

9.1 The Head of Strategy introduced a draft version of the Commission's corporate governance framework.

9.2 The Committee discussed the framework and agreed that it should provide a starting point for the governance arrangements of the independent Boundary Committee.

**March 2009**