

LGBCE (12) 3rd Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 13 March 2012, at 11:15 am, in Rooms A & B,
Layden House, 76-86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG

Commissioners Present:

Max Caller CBE (Chair)
Professor Colin Mellors (Deputy Chair)
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL
Sir Tony Redmond
Dr Colin Sinclair CBE
Professor Paul Wiles CB

LGBCE Officers Present:

Alan Cogbill	Chief Executive
Archie Gall	Director of Reviews
David Hewitt	Director of Finance
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Timothy Bowden	Review Manager
Alison Wildig	Implementation and Programme Manager
Marcus Bowell	Communications Manager
Sarah Vallotton	Business & Committee Services Manager
David Owen	Policy & Research Officer
Alex Skerten	Review Officer
Arion Lawrence	Review Officer
Danny Edwards	Review Officer
Richard Otterway	Review Officer
Jessica Metheringham-Owlett	Review Officer
Nicholas Dunkeyson	Review Officer
Dean Faccini	Business Assistant (minutes)

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 14 February 2012

The minutes of the Commission meeting on 14 February 2012 were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

No matters arising.

Declarations of interest:

No declarations of interest.

1. Operational Report – LGBCE (12)22

The Commission was reminded that this would be the last Commission meeting before Alison Wildig starts maternity leave. Richard Buck would cover the role of Implementation & Programme Manager during Alison's absence.

The two vacant Review Manager posts have now been filled with Jessica Metheringham-Owlett and Daniel Edwards both gaining promotion.

The Commission had yet to discuss the questions used to assess the arguments for council size. The paper would be re-circulated.

It was reported that there were some discrepancies between 2012 electoral data supplied by Plymouth University and that provided by the Office of National Statistics. Officers were speaking to both organisations to investigate the possible reasons for this and to determine their accuracy.

East Hertfordshire / Stevenage PABR: Consultation on the draft recommendations had closed on 6 March with all responses supporting the draft recommendations.

Northumberland/Gateshead PABR: The consultation had produced four responses, three of which supported the draft recommendations.

Cumbria: The Commission's response to the formal complaint made by the Leader and Deputy Leader of the council was noted.

The order implementing the Commission's recommendations for the Welwyn Hatfield/St Albans PABR had been made by DCLG.

2. Milton Keynes Council Size & Review Type – LGBCE (12)23

It had been agreed to review Milton Keynes due to electoral imbalance. The review had commenced in January 2012. According to the latest electoral figures, 39 per cent of its wards had variances greater than 10 per cent and one ward had an electoral variance of more than 30 per cent from the average.

The Commission had held meetings with local authority leaders and officers both to explain the review process and to seek information about electorate forecasts and the basis of the proposed council size. The current size of the Council is 51 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representative arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was insufficient evidence to support the council size changing to 57 members as proposed by the Council.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the current evidence submitted they were minded to support a council size of 51 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that insufficient evidence had been received to support a council size of 57. The Commission agreed to consult on council size of 51, the current size, but to delay commencing consultation until after the elections to Milton Keynes Council in May 2012 complying with normal purdah restrictions.

3. Fenland District Council Size & Review Type – LGBCE (12)24

It had been agreed to review Fenland District Council due to electoral imbalance. The review had commenced on 6 February 2012. According to the latest electoral figures, 33 per cent of its wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with two wards being over 30 per cent.

The Commission had held meetings with local authority leaders and officers both to explain the review process and to seek information about electorate forecasts and the basis of the proposed council size. The current size of the Council is 40 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representational arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support the council size remaining at 40 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted they were 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. It was agreed that the review be classed as a short review for the next stages of the review process.

4. Herefordshire Council Size & Review Type – LGBCE (12)25

It had been agreed to review Herefordshire Council due to electoral imbalance. The review had commenced in February 2012. According to the latest electoral figures, 30 per cent of wards have variances greater than 10 per cent with one ward being over 34 per cent.

The Commission had held meetings with local authority leaders and officers both to explain the review process and to seek information about electorate forecasts and the basis of the proposed council size. The current size of the Council is 58 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representative arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support the council size changing to 54 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence the Commission agreed to consult on a council size of 54 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed to consult on the proposal to reduce the council size of Herefordshire Council to 54 members. It was agreed that the review be classed as a long review for the next stages of the review process.

5. Bromsgrove District Council Size & Review Type – LGBCE (12)26

It had been agreed to review Bromsgrove District Council at the request of the authority. The review had commenced in February 2012. According to the latest electoral figures, three wards have variances greater than 10 per cent.

The Commission had held meetings with local authority leaders and officers both to explain the review process and to seek information about electorate forecasts and the basis of the proposed council size. The current size of the Council is 39 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representative arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support the council size changing to 31 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted the Commission agreed to consult on a council size of 31 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed to consult on the proposal to reduce the council size of Bromsgrove District Council to 31 members. It was agreed that the review be classed as a long review for the next stages of the review process.

6. Gedling Council Size & Review Type – LGBCE (12)27

It had been agreed to review Gedling Borough Council at the request of the authority. The review had commenced on 6 February 2012. According to the latest electoral figures, four of the 22 wards have variances greater than 10 per cent.

The Commission had held meetings with local authority leaders and officers both to explain the review process and to seek information about electorate forecasts and the basis of the proposed council size. The current size of the Council is 50 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representative arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support the council size changing to 40 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted the Commission agreed to consult on a council size of 40 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed to consult on the proposal to reduce the council size of Gedling Borough Council to 40 members. It was agreed that the review be classed as a long review for the next stages of the review process.

7. Hambleton Council Size & Review – LGBCE (12)28

It had been agreed to review Hambleton District Council at the request of the authority. The review had commenced on 6 February 2012. According to the latest electoral figures, 30 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The Commission had held meetings with local authority leaders and officers both to explain the review process and to seek information about electorate forecasts and the basis of the proposed council size. The current size of the Council is 44 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representative arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support the council size changing to 28 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted the Commission agreed to consult on a council size of 28 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed to consult on the proposal to reduce the council size of Hambleton District Council to 28 members. It was agreed that the review be classed as a long review for the next stages of the review process.

8. Vale of White Horse Council Size & Review Type – LGBCE (12)29

It had been agreed to review Vale of White Horse District Council at the request of the authority. The review had commenced in February 2012. According to the latest electoral figures, 21 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent. No ward had a variance of over 30 per cent.

The Commission had held meetings with local authority leaders and officers both to explain the review process and to seek information about electorate forecasts and the basis of the proposed council size. The current size of the Council is 51 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representative arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support that the council size changing to 38 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted the Commission agreed to consult on a council size of 38 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed to consult on the proposal to reduce the council size of Vale of White Horse District Council to 38 members. It was agreed that the review be classed as a long review for the next stages of the review process.

9. South Oxfordshire Council Size – LGBCE (12)30

It had been agreed to review South Oxfordshire District Council at the request of the authority. The review had commenced on 6 February 2012. According to the latest electoral figures, 14 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with no wards being over 30 per cent.

The Commission had held meetings with local authority leaders and officers both to explain the review process and to seek information about electorate forecasts and the basis of the proposed council size. The current size of the Council is 48 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representative arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support that the council size changing to 36 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted the Commission agreed to consult on council size of 36 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed to consult on the proposal to reduce the council size of South Oxfordshire District Council to 36 members. It was agreed that the review be classed as a long review for the next stages of the review process.

10. Tower Hamlets Council Size & Review Type – LGBCE (12)31

It had been agreed to review Tower Hamlets Council due to electoral imbalance. The review had commenced on 9 January 2012. According to the latest electoral figures, 35 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with one ward being over 30 per cent.

The Commission had held meetings with local authority leaders and officers both to explain the review process and to seek information about electorate forecasts and the basis of the proposed council size. The current size of the Council is 51 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representative arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support the council size changing to 45 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted the Commission agreed to consult on a council size of 45 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed to consult on the proposal to reduce the council size of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to 45 members. It was agreed that the review be classed as a long review for the next stages of the review process.

11. Rushcliffe Post Consultation Council Size Decision – LGBCE (12)32

It had been agreed to review Rushcliffe Borough Council at the request of the authority. The review had commenced on 7 November 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, 32 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The Commission had held meetings with local authority leaders and officers both to explain the review process and to seek information about electorate forecasts and the basis of the proposed council size. The current size of the Council is 50 members.

During the council size stage, the Council had proposed a reduction in council size from 50 to 45 members. Having considered the evidence received the Commission decided to consult on the proposal for a reduction in council size to 45 members.

During the consultation on council size, the Commission received eight submissions, including submissions from the Conservative Group, Liberal Democrat Group, Labour Group, and the Green Group on the council. The Commission also received submissions from Gotham Parish Council and three local residents. The submissions received supported a range of council sizes from 45 to the current 50 elected members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representative arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support the council size changing to 45 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted they were minded to support a council size of 45 members.

Agreed

The Commission was minded to recommend a council size of 45 members for Rushcliffe Borough Council

12. Tonbridge & Malling Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (12)33

The review of Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council had commenced in November 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, 38 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with one being over 30 per cent.

At its meeting on 17 January 2012, the Commission was minded to agree a Council size of 53 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 six three-member wards, 17 two-member wards and one single-member ward.

The Commission considered the recommendations in detail informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the submissions received. It agreed the Draft Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for Tonbridge & Malling as presented.

13. Slough Final Recommendations – LGBCE (12)34

The review of Slough Borough Council had commenced in May 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, 50 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 14 June 2011, the Commission was minded to agree a Council size of 42 and had subsequently, on 8 November 2011, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 22 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations. These 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 respect of central and western Slough and these changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations put to the Commission.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 13 three-member wards, one two-member ward and one single-member ward.

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 Slough Borough Council as presented.

14. North Devon Related Alterations – LGBCE (12)36

The Commission noted the content of the North Devon Related Alterations paper. The proposed changes would affect approximately 121 electors within the district and would not cause the FER criteria to be triggered.

Agreed

An order would be drafted to implement the related alternations for North Devon District Council as proposed in the report.

15. 2011-1013 Review Programme Quarterly Update – LGBCE (12)36

The Commission examined the current review work programme which had been examined last at December's Commission meeting. As the Commission had noted in December, Harrogate Borough Council no longer met the FER criteria. Furthermore, the Council had decided not to request a review. It was proposed that Shepway District Council (which did meet the FER criteria and had expressed an interest in having an electoral review) replace Harrogate in the review programme.

It was also noted that due to recent staff changes, some planned reviews would be re-allocated to both existing and newly appointed Review Officers.

Agreed

1. The changes to the review programme as set out in the report and the subsequent discussion.
2. The removal of Harrogate Borough Council from the programme;
3. The inclusion of Shepway District Council in the programme to replace Harrogate, subject to a formal request being received.
4. The swapping of Lead Commissioners for the Selby and Shepway reviews.

16. Chair's Report (oral) – LGBCE (12)

The Chair updated the Commission on his attendance, with the Chief Executive, at the Speaker's Committee meeting on Wednesday 7 March.

The Chair reported that Commissioners' annual appraisal meetings would be organised in the near future.

Agreed

The Business & Committee Services Manager to contact individual Commissioners for available dates and arrange appraisal meetings.

17. Chief Executive Report (oral) – LGBCE (12)

The Chief Executive updated the Commission on the LGA's negotiations with Liberata on the service level agreement under which Liberata provides services to the Commission.

The Chief Executive advised the Commission that the LGBCE Resilience plan would be circulated later in the week.

18. Confirmation of 2012-13 Budget – LGBCE (12)37

The Finance Director reported that amendments to the 2012-13 budget as requested by the Commission at January's Commission meeting had been made.

Agreed

That the 2012-13 Budget be approved subject to Speaker's Committee confirming its agreement to the 2012-13 Estimate.

19. Stakeholder Survey – KPI 3 Update – LGBCE (12)38

The Commission considered a document produced by the Policy & Research Officer outlining an approach to help in understanding the perception of those engaging with the Commission during the review process, whilst recognising that it would always be difficult to separate this from individuals' agreement or disagreement with the decisions made.

In addition, assessing the impact of outcomes themselves was also important and it was agreed that they would build on the telephone survey of electors and councillors after the May 2011 elections, in areas where new schemes had been implemented. Further surveys would form a picture of effectiveness over time and the next survey was programmed for 2013.

Agreed

1. The Stakeholder Survey as a whole, subject to minor changes to phrasing of the questionnaires to be discussed with Deputy Chair.
2. A further selective survey in 2013 would again seek to elicit information on perceived outcomes.

20. Risk Review – LGBCE (12)39

The Finance Director presented the Risk Register to the Commission and the Commission noted its content.

21. Draft Statement on Internal Control (Governance Statement) – LGBCE (12)40

The Commission noted the content of the Governance Statement.

22. Future Business – LGBCE (12)41

The Commission noted the content of Future Business.

15:45 Meeting Closed