

LGBCE (15)11th Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday, 17th November 2015, at 9:30am, in meeting room 29th Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP

Commissioners Present

Max Caller CBE (Chair)
Professor Colin Mellors (Deputy Chair)
Alison Lowton
Sir Tony Redmond
Professor Paul Wiles CB

LGBCE Officers Present:

Jolyon Jackson CBE	Chief Executive
Lynn Ingram	Finance Director
Marcus Bowell	Director of Strategy and Communications
Tim Bowden	Review Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Alison Evison	Review and Programme Manager
Sarah Vallotton	Business & Committee Services Manager
Paul Kingsley	Review Officer (items 7 & 13)
Mark Pascoe	Review Officer (item 8)
Jo Porter	Review Officer (item 9)
David Owen	Review Officer (item 10)
Will Morrison	Review Officer (item 12)
Michelle vonAhn	Policy & Research Officer (item 14)
Karen Cleverly	Business Support Officer (minutes)

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Declarations of interest

The Chief Executive declared an interest in item 6 (Welwyn Hatfield) and took no part in the discussions of that item. Alison Lowton declared an interest in Rotherham which was referred to in the Operational Report. Both the Review Manager and the Business Support Officer declared an interest in item 7 (West Sussex).

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 20th October 2015

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

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

1. Operational Report - LGBCE (15)112

The Chief Executive presented the Operational Report for November and the Commission noted its content.

He reported on his recent meeting with Paul Rowsell (Department for Communities and Local Government) to discuss possible impacts on the work of the Commission arising from the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill.

The Director of Strategy and Communications confirmed that Orders for Exeter and Dorset would be made early in 2016; another tranche including Knowsley and Winchester were likely to be made before the end of the year.

2. Eastleigh Council Size - LGBCE (15)113

It had been agreed to review Eastleigh Borough Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 21 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with one ward, Hedge End Grange, being 30 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 44 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 five from 44 to 39 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 39 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 39 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

3. South Cambridgeshire Council Size - LGBCE (15)114

It had been agreed to review South Cambridgeshire District Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 21 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with two wards, Bourn and Histon & Impington, being over 30 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 57 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 57 to 45 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 45 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 45 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

4. Newcastle upon Tyne Council Size - LGBCE (15)115

It had been agreed to review Newcastle upon Tyne City Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 35 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 78 members.

Information had been received relating to future governance and representational arrangements. In particular, two council size proposals – one for retaining the existing number of 78 and an alternative one for a reduction to 60 – had been forward. Having considered the evidence received, LGBCE officers judged that, on the available evidence, there was a case for moving to a reduced council size although the argument for a reduction to 60 was not sufficiently articulated. Instead, they judged that the evidence presented pointed towards a council size of 66 as being the most appropriate. Accordingly, they recommended that this latter figure be used for seeking further views from the Council and its constituent groups.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this, it was agreed that a council size of 66 members appeared the most appropriate. However, before confirming this figure, it was agreed that further views be sought from the Council and its constituent groups and that the review be delayed for two months in order for this further consultation to take place. In the event that no further evidence was presented then it was indicated that the figure of 66 would be confirmed at the subsequent Commission meeting.

Agreed

- The Commission agreed that the evidence pointed to a council size of 66, but the Council and its constituent groups should be asked for their views on such a council size.
- That the review be delayed for two months in order for this further consultation to take place.

5. Redbridge Council Size - LGBCE (15)116

It had been agreed to review London Borough of Redbridge at the request of the local authority. It now also meets the intervention criteria. According to the latest available electoral figures, 33 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 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 there was sufficient evidence to support that the council size remain at 63 members. However, because of an issue that had arisen regarding the electorate forecasts, LGBCE officers recommended that the consultation on warding patterns be delayed to allow the team and lead commissioner to report back to the Commission on electorate forecasts in December 2015.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 63 members. It agreed to receive a further report on electorate forecasts in December 2015 and to postpone warding arrangements until early 2016.

Agreed

- The Commission agreed that a council size of 63 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.
- It agreed to receive a further report on electorate forecasts in December 2015 and to postpone warding arrangements consultation until early 2016.

6. South Lakeland Council Size - LGBCE (15)118

It had been agreed to review South Lakeland District Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 33 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 51 members.

At its meeting on 20th October 2015 the Commission had been minded to agree a Council size of 51. On 29th October 2015, however, the Commission had received a submission on council size from the Conservative Group on South Lakeland District Council.

This latter submission had been sent by recorded delivery (dated 11 September 2015) to the Commission's old offices in Farringdon. Although arrangements had been made for post sent to the old address to be forwarded to the Commission's current address in Millbank Tower this appeared not to have happened and, consequently, the correspondence had been lost for several weeks.

In the circumstances, notwithstanding the decision that had been taken at its meeting on 20 October, the Commission agreed to review that earlier decision and to take into full account of the submission as if it had been received in advance of the October meeting.

Taking account of all of the evidence submitted, including the Conservative submission, LGBCE officers were of the firm view that the original decision remained the correct one and that the Commission should reconfirm its decision to agree a council size of 51 for South Lakeland District Council.

The Commission considered the additional evidence received and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to reconfirm its support for a council size of 51 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 51 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

7. West Sussex Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (15)119

The review of West Sussex County Council had commenced on 16 June 2015. According to the latest available electoral figures, 32 per cent of divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 16 June 2015, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 70 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 70 single-member divisions 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 with amendments in the following areas:

- The change of name of Shoreham East to Shoreham North.
- The change of name of Shoreham West to Shoreham South.

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for West Sussex County Council as modified.

8. Birmingham Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (15)120

The review of Birmingham City Council had commenced on 14 July 2015. The Commission is undertaking an electoral review of Birmingham City Council on the basis of effective and convenient local government. This had been agreed in light of the review by Sir Bob Kerlake (now Lord Kerlake) into the governance and organisation capabilities of the City Council.

At its meeting on 14 July 2015, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 100.

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 revised Council size of 101 with a pattern of 24 two-member, and 53 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.

As a result of this further consideration and, on the basis of the evidence, the Commission agreed to move away from its original opinion on council size and, instead, agreed a council size of 101 as this provided for an improved reflection of the statutory criteria.

It agreed the Draft Recommendations as presented with amendments in the following areas:

- The change of name of Jewellery Quarter & Winson Green area to Winson Green.

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for Birmingham City Council as modified.

9. Lincolnshire Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (15)121

The review of Lincolnshire County Council had commenced on 21 April 2015. According to the latest available electoral figures, 32 per cent of divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent with two divisions, Bourne Abbey and Stamford West, being over 30 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 April 2015, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 71.

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 revised Council size of 70 with a pattern of 70 single-member divisions 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.

As a result of this further consideration and, on the basis of the evidence, the Commission agreed to move away from its original opinion on council size and, instead, agreed a council size of 70 as this provided for a better allocation. It agreed the Draft Recommendations as presented with amendments in the following areas:

- Slight amendment to the proposed boundary between Carholme and Ermine & Cathedral areas to ensure co-terminosity.
- Slight amendment to the proposed boundary between Moulton Seas End and Cowbit areas to ensure co-terminosity
- Slight amendment to the proposed boundary between Belton Park and Spittlegate areas to ensure co-terminosity

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for Lincolnshire County Council as modified.

10. Elmbridge Final Recommendations - LGBCE (15)122

The paper was withdrawn. It would be considered at the next meeting.

11. Welwyn Hatfield Final Recommendations - LGBCE (15)123

The review of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council had commenced on 17 March 2015. According to the latest available electoral figures, 41 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 17 March 2015, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 48 and had subsequently, on 18 August 2015, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 69 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 16 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 Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council as presented.

12. Warrington Final Recommendations - LGBCE (15)124

The review of Warrington Borough Council had commenced on 21 April 2015. According to the latest available electoral figures, 41 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 April 2015, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 58 and had subsequently, on 17 August 2015, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 140 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 had been judged that there was insufficient evidence to change the Draft Recommendations, and therefore, they were proposed as the Final Recommendations for Warrington Borough Council.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 13 three-member and nine 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 Warrington Borough Council as presented.

13. Watford Final Recommendations - LGBCE (15)125

The review of Watford Borough Council had commenced on 17 March 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 March 2015, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 36 and had subsequently, on 18 August 2015, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 21 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 12 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 Watford Borough Council as presented.

14. Forecasting - LGBCE (15)126

The Policy & Research Officer introduced her report on a proposed new in-house method for forecasting electorates.

The method was intended to improve consistency and used output areas rather than polling districts. Local authority input would only be needed to identify any large scale changes, such as significant new housing developments or demolitions.

The benefits of the new method included better accuracy, a reduction in the time taken to carry out reviews and an immediate reference point for Review Officers.

The method tended to over-estimate slightly and student registration had a big impact. The differences due to under-estimation tended to be smaller and were linked to areas with development, migration or registration campaigns.

A comparison against reviews that had been completed gave a good result against the actual electorate.

The next step would be to obtain peer reviews of the method by the end of the year. The LGA Statistics Working Group, CIPFA and LARIA were possible contacts for this. It was hoped that the new method would be ready to use for review work by the middle of 2016.

Commissioners agreed that the work was extremely valuable. Paul Wiles would act as lead Commissioner for the working group.

Agreed

- To proceed with the forecasting method and obtain peer reviews.
- Paul Wiles would be the lead Commissioner for the project.

15. Order Laying Process - LGBCE (15)127

The Review Manager introduced a report outlining the current order laying process, as concern had been raised at the strategic planning event about the length of time between the end of a review and the laying of an Order in Parliament.

The paper was noted and officers were asked to investigate ways of shortening the time period, particularly with regard to the time Government Legal Department was given in the Service Level Agreement to draft an Order.

16. Chair's Report

The Chair reported on his recent correspondence; with the Speaker, regarding the delay in the appointment of the new Commissioners; and with the Secretary of State, regarding the appointment of a new Deputy Chair. He would pursue both matters.

17. Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive asked the Review Manager to report back on the latest meeting with Southampton University. Their model would be trialled on the Bristol review. The model was complementary to the work being carried out on forecasting.

Currently there was no budget impact (other than travel expenses). A business plan would need to be developed which included the costs and the potential savings to be achieved.

The Director of Strategy and Communications gave a brief report on the work being undertaken by De Monfort University. He would give a further update at the December Commission meeting.

18. Finance Director's Report

The Finance Director reported that the Commission's forward plan would seek to set a target of savings of around £140,000 over 5 years. The Chair suggested that a draft of the business plan for the Speaker's Committee should be prepared for the December Commission meeting.

19. Audit & Risk Committee – Chair's Report

The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee gave a brief update on its most recent meeting on 16 November.

Risk

- The committee had decided to focus on one risk each meeting, and the meeting had focused on the risk of the Commission becoming inquorate.
- On the reporting of risks, the committee had been pleased with the development of the risk register, but were concerned about the management of certain risks including resilience of the organisation and information security, where a more succinct policy was needed.
- The lack of red risks was queried.
- There would be a risk report from each Audit & Risk Committee for the Commission in future.

Key Performance Indicators

There had been a useful discussion, with further work needed.

Audit

- The subject of the NAO value for money audit would be the office relocation and back office project.
- The internal auditors had produced green/amber reports on governance, the relocation project and KPI 3. No undue concerns had been raised.

Finally, the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee reminded that a replacement for the independent member of the committee would be needed by August 2016. A job description would be considered at the Audit & Risk Committee and decision would be made by the Commission on the recommendation of Audit & Risk Committee. It was also noted that Colin Mellors would no longer be a member of the Audit & Risk Committee and that another member of the Commission would need to be identified to take on this role.

The Audit & Risk Committee minutes would be provided for the December Commission meeting.

20. Future Business – LGBCE (15)128

It was suggested that the need for the February 2016 be reviewed since, at present, there were few items scheduled for that meeting.

AOB

The Chair reiterated the Commission's stance on how changes to review policy are handled. Policy changes are not considered as part of a specific review. If evidence is received from a specific review that points to a need to reconsider established policy then the team will present a policy paper to the Commission in a separate meeting at a later date. Implementation of a change in policy only takes place for reviews that have yet to start (following a period of consultation if it is deemed necessary). For those reviews that are in progress, the Commission continues with the existing policy in place at the commencement of the review as this would be the legitimate expectation of the authority under consideration.

Policy changes would normally began with an appreciation of current legislation, how that legislation has been interpreted, and whether new advice is now available.

Close of Business 13:00