

LGBCE (11) 11th Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 13 December 2011, at
11.15am, 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:

Archie Gall	Director of Reviews
David Hewitt	Director of Finance
Joan D'Souza	Review Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Timothy Bowden	Review Manager
Marcus Bowell	Communications & Public Affairs Manager
Sarah Vallotton	Business & Committee Services Manager (minutes)
David Owen	Policy & Research Officer
Jessica Metherringham-Owlett	Review Officer (Item 2 & Item 3)
Richard Otterway	Review Officer (Item 5)
Paul Kingsley	Review Adviser (Item 6)
Danny Edwards	Review Officer (Item 7)
Nicholas Dunkeyson	Review Assistant (Item 4)
Dean Faccini	Business Assistant
Natassija Watson	Business Assistant

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Alan Cogbill, Chief Executive.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 8 November 2011

The Commission agreed the minutes of the 8 November 2011 Commission meeting as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

Declarations of interest:

There were no declarations of interest.

1. Operational Report – LGBCE (11)119

The Director of Reviews presented the December Operational Report.

The Cumbria consultation had been extended by two weeks with the consultation ending on 30 January 2012, to take account of the Christmas and New Year period and to encourage the maximum possible response.

The Commission had been informed that the Government's Chief Whip was minded to schedule a debate in respect of the draft order for Daventry District Council which has been scheduled to take place on 24 January. Although it would be possible to make the order for this review alongside others, in the circumstances the Commission was, exceptionally, minded to delay the Daventry order until after the debate had taken place,

Agreed:

1. The orders for West Lindsey, Swindon, Hartlepool and Rugby would be made on 4 January 2012, but the order for Daventry would be deferred pending the proposed debate.

2. Oxfordshire CC – Modifications to Final Recommendations – LGBCE (11)131

The final recommendations for Oxfordshire County Council had been agreed by the Commission at its meeting on 8 November 2011.

On 30 November, a Community Governance Order was made by West Oxfordshire District Council making seven alterations to the external boundaries of parishes in West Oxfordshire. Three of the changes to parish boundaries had an impact on proposed electoral division boundaries.

Two of the three areas affected did not contain any electors and, in the third, the impact on electoral variance was negligible. The team therefore proposed

that the Commission agree to alter its intended, but unpublished, final recommendations for Oxfordshire County Council in order that the relevant electoral division boundaries would be coterminous with the new parish boundaries.

Agreed:

1. That the final recommendations should be amended as proposed. The Commission registered its thanks to Jessica Metheringham-Owlett for preparing the revised recommendations within such a short timescale.

3. Rushcliffe Council Size & Review Type - LGBCE(11)132

It had been agreed to review Rushcliffe Borough Council at the Commission meeting on 8 March 2011 and 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 from the average.

The Commission had held meetings with Group Leaders at Rushcliffe and with officers to explain the review process. The current size of the Council is 50 members.

The Council proposed a reduction in council size to 45 members. Evidence was provided about the future governance and representational arrangements. It was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support the council size changing to 45 members, subject to the outcome of public consultation.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and were of the view that suitable evidence had been received to consult on a reduced council size of 45 members.

Agreed

1. The Commission agreed to consult on a reduced council size of 45 members.

4. Tonbridge & Malling Council Size & Review Type - LGBCE (11)133

Agreed

In view of the fact that a paper pertaining to this review had only been made available at the meeting, the Commission agreed that this item should be deferred to the Commission meeting in January 2012 in order to allow proper consideration of all the relevant evidence submitted.

5. Boston Council Size & Review Type – LGBCE (11)134

It had been agreed to review Boston Council at the Commission meeting on 14 June 2011 and the review had commenced on 27 July 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, 38 per cent of wards/divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The Commission had held meetings with local authority group 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 32 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representational arrangements, and a subsequent meeting with group leaders and senior officers, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support the council size changing to 30 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted it was minded to support a council size of 30 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 30 be used as the basis for the preparation of draft recommendations. It was agreed that a public consultation on council size was not required and that the next stage of information gathering on warding arrangements should commence.

6. Warwick Council Size & Review Type – LGBCE (11)135

On receiving the Council's submission it had become clear that a further meeting with Council group leaders to elicit additional information would be appropriate before the Commission would be in a position to take a view about the most appropriate council size for Warwick District Council. The team hoped to arrange a meeting in early January so that this could be considered at the January Commission meeting. If this were not possible, the item would be considered at the February Commission meeting.

Agreed:

To defer consideration of council size to the January or February 2012 meeting of the Commission, depending on the date of the meeting with Council group leaders..

7. Stevenage/East Hertfordshire Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (11)125

On 8 November 2011, the Commission had agreed that a PABR of the boundary between East Hertfordshire District Council and Stevenage Borough Council in the vicinity of Gresley Way should be progressed.

The area encompassed 29 residential properties which were split between the two authorities. It also included five properties wholly within the East Hertfordshire District. A total of 44 electors would be affected by the changes set out in the draft recommendations. The proposed changes had no overall detrimental impact on either of the Councils affected.

The Commission was asked to agree the draft recommendations, the draft letter to consultees and the consultation report. The Commission was also asked to consider delaying the beginning of the consultation until January 2012 to avoid the start of consultation taking place over the Christmas and New Year period.

Agreed:

1. The draft recommendations, the letter to consultees and consultation report, and that the consultation should begin in January 2012.
2. That the Commission should consider whether a Lead Commissioner should be appointed for future PABRs.

8. Northumberland/Gateshead PABR Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (11)136

At its meeting on 11 October, the Commission agreed that a PABR of the boundary between Northumberland County Council and Gateshead Council should be progressed.

The boundary had been identified as anomalous in light of the fact that a property registered with Northumberland County Council was mostly located in the Gateshead. A total of two electors would be affected by the changes set out in the draft recommendations. The proposed changes had no affect on electoral arrangements in either of the two local authority areas.

The Commission was asked to agree the draft recommendations, the draft letter to electors and the consultation report.

Agreed:

1. The draft recommendations, the letter to consultees and consultation report, and that the consultation should begin in January 2012.

9. Review Programme – LGBCE (11)138

Since the Commission had last examined the current work programme in October 2011, a number of changes had been made. Two authorities (London Borough of Barking & Dagenham and Watford Borough Council) had withdrawn their requests for an electoral review. These had been replaced by two different requests for electoral reviews (East Dorset and Selby).

It was intimated that Fenland had requested more time to prepare for the review, and so its review would be moved (subject to clarification with the Council and the Commission's agreement) to the next tranche of reviews. This would result in the Commission considering Fenland's council size in March, rather than February as originally planned. This would have no impact on the financial year in which the review is scheduled to be completed.

Commissioners requested a further minor amendment to the allocation of Lead Commissioner for the Darlington and Corby reviews.

Due to recent staff changes, some planned reviews would be re-allocated to both existing and newly appointed Review Officers.

The Commission considered the relative priorities of interventions consequent upon councils meeting the appropriate variance criteria and those where the council had itself requested a review. The Commission considered that it was important to continue to address electoral inequality but that it was also important to retain sufficient scope in their work plan to respond to a number requested reviews in future review programmes. The Commission considered this balance should be monitored on an ongoing basis.

Agreed:

1. The changes to the review programme as set out in the report and the subsequent discussion.
2. There should be no proactive and general invitation to local authorities to request electoral or boundary reviews in financial year 2013/14.
3. The Commission should seek to increase the number of reviews of local authorities that meet its intervention criteria.
4. Further requests from local authorities themselves for reviews should be considered on their merit, having regard to 3 above.
5. The Commission will review its 2013/14 review programme again at its June 2012 meeting, when December 2011 electoral register data will have been analysed and further work undertaken on the availability of additional review slots.

10. Councillor Survey Report – LGBCE (11)139

The Commission considered the paper and noted its content. There was discussion as to whether it might be possible to get more detailed information from the LGA, including aggregated results by authority.

The Commission also suggested that an offer be made to the LGA to assist with the design of future censuses.

Agreed:

1. That the LGA be contacted with a view to it providing further information and to input to the content of future censuses.

11. Chair's Report

The Chair had nothing to report other than items that had occurred elsewhere on the agenda.

12. Chief Executive's Report

In the absence of the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance gave a short overview of the Commission's budget. He reported that the previously anticipated small underspend remained a likely outcome, although there were some projects in train that might alter this position.

Some provisions relating to a current HR issue were being sought from the Commission's auditor.

Two follow up questions had been received from the Speaker's Committee relating to savings on staffing and customer satisfaction.

Progress had been made on negotiating efficiency savings in mapping and printing.

13. Audit Committee Minutes and Review of Terms of Reference – LGBCE (11)140

The Chair of the Audit Committee recommended the changes made to the Audit Committee's Terms of Reference as set out in the paper.

Training for members of the Audit Committee would be taking place in the coming months.

The Audit Committee had discussed how to make the KPI relating to customer satisfaction more appropriate, including changes that could be made to the collection of feedback.

The Audit Committee had focussed on the Commission's Risk Register and welcomed the improvements to the Risk Policy and the method of identifying and measuring risk.

The Audit Committee had considered how it might ensure best value for money from its external auditors, and would be discussing the matter with them.

Agreed:

1. The Audit Committee's revised Terms of Reference.

14. Agenda Items for the Commissioner/Staff Event – January 2012 – LGBCE (11)141

The Commission considered the coverage and format of the proposed workshop scheduled for January and how it might make most effective use of Commissioner and Officer input in addressing the key policy matters that would be addressed during the session..

15. Future Business

The Commission noted the content of the Future Business paper.

13.20pm Meeting Closed