

LGBCE (12) 5th Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 15 May 2012, at 10.00am, 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
Richard Buck	Implementation & Programme Manager
Jessica Metherringham-Owlett	Review Manager
Danny Edwards	Review Manager
Marcus Bowell	Communications Manager
Sarah Vallotton	Business & Committee Services Manager
David Owen	Policy & Research Officer
Simon Keal	Review Officer
William Morrison	Review Officer
Richard Otterway	Review Officer
Alex Skerten	Review Officer
Julian Pellew-Martin	Business Assistant
Dean Faccini	Business Assistant (minutes)

The Chair welcomed Julian Pellew-Martin, the new Business Assistant, to his first Commission meeting.

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 14 April 2012

The minutes of the Commission meeting on 17 April 2012 were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

No matters arising.

Declarations of interest:

Dr Colin Sinclair declared an interest in Cumbria and would withdraw from discussion of that item. Professor Paul Wiles declared an interest in the National Park Consultation and would withdraw from discussion of that item.

1. Discussion on Council Size Questions – LGBCE (12)53

A paper setting out draft questions on council size was presented to the Commission. The purpose of the questions was to aid councils in preparing effective submissions on council size and as a guide to the dialogue between the Commission and councils during the preliminary stages of a review.

The Commission was asked to approve the approach, which would subsequently be published in technical guidance.

Agreed

1. That the Deputy Chair's suggested amendments to the original questions should be incorporated.
2. That the wording of some of the questions should be changed so that they were all open questions to encourage more comprehensive responses.
3. That a preamble should be included referring to the statutory criteria and the Commission's approach and explaining that different councils may need to take different approaches to answering the questions. It should not seem obligatory to answer all.
4. That the Communications Manager would work with the Policy and Research Officer to produce a final draft for final authorisation by the Chair and Deputy Chair.

2. Operational Report – LGBCE (12)54

The preliminary period of the electoral review of the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea had begun in January 2012. Latest figures showed that electorate figures had changed sufficiently such that RBKC would no longer meet the criteria for an intervention review. The Commission, however, had not received a request from RBKC to stop the review and it would proceed as planned.

The Cumbria review had been temporarily delayed due to a family bereavement affecting the Review Officer and the revised publication date for the final recommendations was now envisaged for 12 June 2012.

The Director of Reviews alerted the Commission that, due to the recent decision on council size consultation and the number of reviews that would, as a result, come to fruition at the same time, there would be increased pressures on the number of reviews for discussion at Commission meetings in the coming months, nearly doubling in October.

Resilience planning to ensure cover at peak times and total review capacity would be discussed initially at the July Commission meeting, but in depth at the strategic planning event in August.

3. Northamptonshire CC Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (12)55

The review of Northamptonshire County Council had commenced in September 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, 41 per cent of divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent with one division being over 30 per cent.

At its meeting in October 2011, the Commission was minded to agree a Council size of 57 and the Draft Recommendations being considered had been prepared on this basis.

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 57 single-member divisions.

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 with modifications in the areas of Kettering and Corby.

Agreed

Draft Recommendations as presented with modifications.

4. Boston BC Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (12)56

The review of Boston 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.

At its meeting on 13 December 2011, the Commission was minded to agree a Council size of 30 and the Draft Recommendations being considered had been prepared on this basis.

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 3 three-member wards, 9 two-member wards, and 3 single-member wards in total.

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 Boston Borough Council as presented.

5. Somerset CC Final Recommendations – LGBCE (12)57

The review of Somerset County Council had commenced in May 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, 36 per cent of divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent with one being over 30 per cent.

At its meeting in August 2011, the Commission was minded to agree a Council size of 55 and had subsequently agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 146 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations. These had been considered carefully against the statutory criteria.

Taking all the submissions into account it had been judged that there was insufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations in most areas of the County.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 1 two-member division and 53 single-member divisions 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 with modifications in the areas of Sedgemoor, South Somerset and Taunton Deane, as outlined in the Commission paper.

Agreed

Final Recommendations for Somerset County Council as presented with modifications.

6. DEFRA National Park Consultation Response – LGBCE (12)58

A paper was presented, setting out a draft response to the DEFRA National Park Consultation.

The Commission noted the report and agreed the draft response set out in Appendix C.

Agreed

That the response should be sent as drafted.

7. Chair's Report

The Chair announced that he would be stepping down from his role as interim Chair of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales. His replacement, Owen Watkin, would take over on 14 June 2012. The Chair expressed the hope that opportunities for joint working and shared knowledge between the two Commissions, would continue in future.

8. Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive reported that the Speaker's Committee had given final approval to the Corporate Plan for 2012-13, and the Financial Estimate for 2012-13. The Treasury had required a footnote in the plan that the mitigated budget figures for the last two years would be subject to the Government's Spending Review for 2015-16 and following years.

Arrangements were in place for the LGA Conference at the end of June.

The Chief Executive asked Commissioners to consider, for later discussion, any requests from the public to attend Commission meetings.

The Chief Executive gave an update on discussion with the National Audit Office on the proposed provision in the accounts for 2011-12.

It was noted that the previous day's Audit Committee had considered the Risk Register, specifically how the Commission as a whole would be appraised of any escalating risks going forward, especially in the areas of finance or ability to meet increased external demands. These would form part of substantial discussions at the strategy workshop in August.

9. NAO VfM Study – LGBCE (12)59

The Chief Executive presented the NAO VfM Study, which he distributed on receipt. The Commission noted its content and formally approved

acceptance of the three recommendations, each of which was being addressed.

10. Report of May Audit Committee

The Chair of the Audit Committee gave a brief report of the Audit Committee meeting the previous day.

The minutes would be circulated in papers for the June Commission meeting.

11. Future Business – LGBCE (12)52

An updated action point list was tabled. The content of the Future Business and its appendix noted.

AOB

Two items were raised.

The Chair requested that a workplan highlighting key dates/milestones of an electoral review be established at the outset of each electoral review in the form of a cover paper. The Implementation & Review Manager indicated that work was already being undertaken to achieve this so that key stages would be kept throughout.

The Director of Reviews informed the Commission that further post-election surveys would be commencing next week for those Local Authorities where elections had taken place in May.

13:40 Meeting Closed