

## **LGBCE (15)12 Meeting**

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2015, at Floor 29 meeting room, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP

### **Commissioners Present**

Max Caller CBE (Chair)  
Professor Colin Mellors (Deputy Chair)  
Alison Lowton  
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 (item 2)
Alison Evison	Review and Programme Manager
Mark Pascoe	Review Officer (item 3)
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (item 4 & 6)
Alex Hinds	Review Officer (item 5)
Dean Faccini	Business Support Officer/Assistant (minutes)

## **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies had been received from Sir Tony Redmond (the Chair advised that he had spoken to Sir Tony who had informed him of his views on relevant items, especially the Elmbridge review where he was Lead Commissioner. These views were conveyed to the meeting as appropriate).

## **Declarations of interest**

Alison Lowton (in respect of Rotherham which is referred to in the Operational Report).

## Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2015

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

### Matters Arising

The Chair indicated that, in his recent meetings, he had raised the possibility of the LGBCE affording local authorities access to its new electoral forecasting methodology. Currently, this is being piloted and will, subsequently, be peer reviewed. At this point this was an offer rather than an agreed new approach but initial feedback suggested the majority of authorities asked would be receptive to this offer.

#### 1. Operational Report - LGBCE (15)129

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

The Chief Executive updated the Commission on his most recent meeting with Paul Rowsell, Department for Communities and Local Government.

An update was given by the Review Manager on the ongoing project with Southampton University on the use of output area data to assist in boundary mapping. The model created by Southampton University had been made available to the LGBCE for piloting and testing. A report on the team's findings would be considered by the Commission in the New Year.

A meeting between the Chief Executive and the Government Legal Department had taken place which included a discussion about the length of time taken for orders to be drafted. It was recognised that there was scope to reduce this period – a seven-day reduction had been initially proposed by the Legal Department – and LGBCE would continue to press this issue.

The Director of Strategy and Communications gave an update on his meeting with Informed Solutions, the company who provide services to our website and portal. He indicated there was potential for them to be involved in the redesign of the LGBCE website plus additional consultancy work on our digital communications.

The Chief Executive had met with partners from the Ordnance Survey with regard to a potential collaborative project known as the 'Geovation Hub'. It is unlikely, however, that the LGBCE would be able to identify useful benefits from this initiative although they would keep it under review.

## 2. Huntingdonshire Council Size - LGBCE (15)130

It had been agreed to review Huntingdonshire District Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 28 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with St Neots & Priory Park ward being over 30 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 52 members. The Council supported retaining this council size.

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 1 from 52 to 51 members. This was informed by the current arrangement of election by thirds and would, accordingly, enable the construction of a pattern of wholly three-member wards.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. It also noted that the authority was due to consider a change to its electoral cycle the following day (16 December 2015) and in the circumstances agreed that should the Council resolve to move to whole council elections, they would be content to agree to the current council size, i.e. 52 members.

### **Agreed**

The Commission agreed that a council size of 51 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations. However, should the Council resolve to change its electoral cycle to one of all-out elections then it would agree to adopt a council size of 52 as the basis of the electoral review.

## 3. Devon Final Recommendations - LGBCE (15)131

The review of Devon County Council had commenced on 21 October 2014. According to the latest available electoral figures, 39 per cent of divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 October 2014, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 60 and had subsequently, on 17 March 2015, agreed Draft Recommendations.

On 8 September 2015, the Commission agreed the final recommendations for seven of the eight districts in Devon County but felt there was sufficient evidence to undertake a period of further limited consultation focusing on the proposals for the North Devon area.

Following publication, 22 submissions had been received commenting on the further limited consultation proposals for North Devon. These 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 sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations for North Devon and adopt the alternative division arrangements that had been the subject of further limited consultation. A respondent had put forward the alternative division name Chulmleigh & Landkey which the team proposed be adopted by the Commission.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of two two-member divisions, and 56 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 as presented.

### **Agreed**

Final Recommendations for Devon County Council presented.

## **4. Kent Final Recommendations – LGBCE (15)132**

The review of Kent County Council had commenced on 18 November 2014. According to the latest available electoral figures, 31 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 November 2014, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 81 and had subsequently, on 21 March 2015, agreed Draft Recommendations.

On 8 September 2015, the Commission agreed the final recommendations for 11 of the 12 districts in Kent County but felt there was sufficient evidence to undertake a period of further limited consultation focusing on the proposals for the Sevenoaks area.

Following publication, 16 submissions had been received commenting on the further limited consultation proposals for Sevenoaks. These 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 sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations for Sevenoaks and adopt the alternative division arrangements that had been the subject of further limited consultation. A respondent had put forward the alternative division name Sevenoaks North & Darent Valley which the team proposed be adopted by the Commission.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of eight two-member divisions, and 65 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 as presented.

**Agreed**

Final Recommendations for Kent County Council as presented.

## 5. Elmbridge Final Recommendations – LGBCE (15)133

The review of Elmbridge Borough Council had commenced on 27 January 2015. According to the latest available electoral figures, 14 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent. The review was being conducted following a request from the authority.

At its meeting on 27 January 2015, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 48 and had subsequently, on 16 June 2015, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 655 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

In reviewing the submissions, the team noted in particular that of the 655 submissions received, 202 submissions were specifically related to recommendations in the Thames Ditton and Long Ditton areas. The evidence received from respondents demonstrated a very strong case to amend the draft recommendations between these two wards on the basis of community identity. In revising the warding arrangements in this area, the Team recognised that doing so would result in a variance of 16% fewer electors per councillor in Long Ditton ward. However, as the evidence received was so persuasive, a strong case had been put forward which justified this variance and there were precedents for accepting this level of variance. Some minor modifications, including the transfer of Hersham Library to Hersham Village ward were also put forward by the team.

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 Elmbridge Borough Council as presented.

## 6. Redbridge Electoral Forecasts – LGBCE (15)134

The Commission was invited to consider the most appropriate electorate forecasts for the London Borough of Redbridge.

In early October, the team had been notified that opposition groups in Redbridge had disputed the electorate forecasts submitted by the Council. After careful inspection of the data, the team, with support from the Lead Commissioner, felt that further information from the Council was required. After considering all the evidence, the Team concluded that the decision for the Council to use the December 2014 electoral register as the base figure was unreliable and inconsistent with the Commission's guidance.

The Team indicated that the December 2015 electoral register, which was now available, provided a better starting point for the electoral forecast and reflected the Commission's electoral review guidance which stated that the latest electorate figures should always be used.

The Commission agreed that the electoral forecast for the London Borough of Redbridge should be based on the December 2015 figure of 190,967 and a figure of 226,478 for 2021 as produced by the London Borough of Redbridge. The teams' own analysis of likely forecast growth based on Office of National Statistics data produced a figure of approximately 224,000 electors.

However, in moving forward, the Commission asked that the team liaise closely with the authority to ensure that projected electorate data at polling district level was also reliable as well as overall levels. This would be necessary in the construction of a valid warding pattern.

### **Agreed**

That the current and forecast electorate data provided by the London Borough of Redbridge be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations. Further work would be done to give assurance about the reliability of polling district data.

## 7. Chair's Report

The Chair had formally written to the Secretary of State inviting him to confirm the appointment of a new Commissioner, the reappointment of Dr Knight for a further term and the appointment of a new Deputy Chair to replace Professor Mellors on his appointment as Chair.

The Chair noted that the Birmingham electoral review was being launched today and that a briefing session for MPs from the Birmingham area had taken place the previous day. Whilst only a small number had availed themselves of the opportunity (three MPs) those had attended indicated that the session had been valuable. The Director of Communications and Strategy also added that local press had given useful coverage of the review.

The Chair noted that letters relating to the proposed Cornwall review had crossed in the post. The Commission discussed the letter that had been received from Cornwall Council and the Chief Executive was asked to draft a letter to the leader of Cornwall County Council addressing the specific concerns that had been raised about the timing of the electoral review. The letter would also seek further information from them about the matter. The Commission noted that careful attention would be required to deploying the necessary resources to achieve the currently proposed programme. They also recognised that in the light of the currently reported ward variances and the Commission's published strategy, an intervention to correct the variances at the earliest possible opportunity was the appropriate approach notwithstanding intentions declared as a part of other Government initiatives.

## **8. Chief Executive's Report**

The Chief Executive updated the Commission on the inter-Commission boundary event that took place in November. It was agreed that this had been a useful event. The next meeting would be held in Belfast in autumn 2016.

The Director of Strategy and Communications gave a brief report on the work being undertaken by De Monfort University.

## **9. Finance Director's Report**

The Finance Director informed the Commission that the Quarter 3 projections would be submitted at the January Commission meeting.

## **10. Record of Signing of Minutes of Audit & Risk Committee Meeting of 16 November – LGBCE (15)135**

Due to the absence of the Audit Committee Chair, the signing of the minutes would be deferred to the meeting in January.

The Chair noted the need to revisit the Audit Committee's membership in January following the Deputy's Chair appointment to Chair.

## **11. Draft Corporate Plan – LGBCE (15)136**

The Director of Strategy and Communications outlined the format of the draft Corporate Plan. The Commission would submit a plan to the Speaker's Committee every five years with the first draft submitted to the Speaker's Committee in February 2015. The format would largely follow the same format of previous corporate plans but also incorporating suggestions from the Commission's strategy event from earlier this year.

Further highlights noted:

- The review programme would continue to be based on electoral reviews but it would also include reviews for metropolitan areas and London boroughs (something that hadn't been undertaken by the Commission for a while).
- The Commission would continue to consider review requests from local authorities.
- The devolution agenda could have an impact on LGBCE's work.
- We have forecasted a 'steady' workload for the foreseeable future.
- We will need to explain to the Speaker's Committee rationale to postpone seven reviews from last year.
- LGBCE continues to work on a more robust method for assessing customer satisfaction and an appropriate metric figure.
- Our record stands at 100% on successfully laying orders.

The Corporate Plan will be published in Parliament for April 2015.

The Finance Director outlined the financial element of the Plan following discussions with the Treasury.

The Commission endorsed the framework, subject to any editorial requirements approved by the Chair and the incorporation of the incoming Chair's foreword.

## 12. Future Business – LGBCE (15)137

The Chief Executive would look at moving the dates for two meetings that clashed with other commitments for two Commissioners will be reminded to bring their dairies to the January meeting.



## AOB

- Jo Porter had been appointed an acting Review Manager to cover for Alison Evison's maternity leave.
- A temporary replacement for the role vacated by the Business and Committee Services Manager would be sought for a period of 3 to 4 months.

It was noted that this was the last meeting for Max Caller whose period of office was due to end on 31 December 2015. The Commission expressed their appreciation for the considerable contribution that had been made under his leadership which included: the establishment of the Commission as an independent body, significant efficiencies in process and output, and a strong reputation both within the local government community and more widely. They expressed their best wishes for all of his future roles. Max Caller wished the incoming Chair and the Commission success in negotiating what would be a challenging future.

**Close of Business 11:55**

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized initial 'M' followed by a long horizontal stroke, with a second horizontal stroke below it.