

LGBCE (12) 6th Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 13 June 2012, at 11.15am, in Rooms A & B,
Layden House, 76-86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG

Commissioners Present

Professor Colin Mellors (Chair)

Dr Peter Knight CBE DL

Sir Tony Redmond

Dr Colin Sinclair CBE

Professor Paul Wiles CB

Invited Guests: Owen Watkin

(Chair, Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales)

Elizabeth Butler

(Independent External Adviser to Audit Committee)

Susan Ronaldson

(National Audit Office)

LGBCE Officers Present:

Alan Cogbill

Chief Executive

Archie Gall

Director of Reviews

David Hewitt

Finance Director

Richard Buck

Implementation & Programme Manager

Tim Bowden

Review Manager

Jessica Metherringham-Owlett

Review Manager

Danny Edwards

Review Manager

Marcus Bowell

Communications Manager

Sarah Vallotton

Business & Committee Services Manager

Simon Keal

Review Officer

Nicholas Dunkeyson

Review Officer

William Morrison

Review Officer

Arion Lawrence

Review Officer

Paul Kingsley

Review Advisor

Richard Otterway

Review Officer

Daniel Knag

Implementation Officer

Julian Pellew-Martin

Business Assistant

Dean Faccini

Business Assistant (minutes)

The Deputy Chair of the Commission chaired the meeting in the Chair's absence.

The Chair welcomed Owen Watkin, the new Chair of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales, to the meeting. He was attending as an observer as part of an ongoing commitment to share good practice between the two organisations.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Max Caller, Chair.

Declarations of interest:

Nicholas Dunkeyson declared an interest in Hackney and would withdraw from discussion of that item.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 15 May 2012

The minutes of the Commission meeting on 15 May 2012 were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

No matters arising.

1. Chief Executive's Report (oral) – LGBCE (12)61

The Chief Executive spoke about the following matters:

- a) He reported on discussions with the National Audit Office (NAO) about a provision in the accounts for restructuring. The consultation process in relation to the restructuring process was underway and was due to end that day. He outlined the views being expressed.
- b) The LGBCE and the PCS had now signed the formal recognition agreement.
- c) The Chair had had been invited by Bob Neill MP (Department for Communities and Local Government) to attend a meeting at the Department which would discuss the challenges facing some smaller district authorities and would be attending with the Chief Executive. It was stressed that it was important that LBCE should be sensitive to adhere to its remit in explaining what assistance it might be able to offer in this area.

- d) A further letter of complaint had been received from the Leader and Deputy Leader of Cumbria. Whilst not compromising the review process, the Chair had agreed to meet the Council along with LGBCE Chief Executive early in July.

2. Audit Committee Annual Report – LGBCE (12)62

The Finance Director presented the Audit Committee Annual Report. The Commission noted its content.

Agreed

That the report be amended to show that it was presented by the Chair of the Audit Committee rather than the Finance Director.

3. Approval of Annual Report and Accounts – LGBCE (12)63

This item was deferred until later in the meeting to enable the National Audit Office Director to attend.

4. Audit Committee Minutes – 14 May 2012 - LGBCE (12)63

The minutes of the Audit Committee meeting on 14 May 2012 were noted.

5. Operational Report – LGBCE (12)64

The Director of Reviews informed the Commission of a letter of complaint from the Leader of Slough Borough Council about the Commission's modifications to its draft recommendations, departing from a uniform pattern of three-member wards. The Chief Executive had responded.

The Commission noted the content of the Operational Report.

6. Overview Report – LGBCE (12)65

The Commission noted the content of the Overview Report.

7. Hackney Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (12)66

The review of Hackney had commenced on 9 January 2012. According to the latest electoral figures, 37 percent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 14 February 2012, the Commission was minded to agree a council size of 57 and the Draft Recommendations being considered had been prepared on the basis of such a council size.

The team had noted discrepancies between the forecast electorates for polling districts and the forecast electorates for new ward boundaries. For consistency and accuracy, the team used the Council's polling district electorate figures in analysing submissions and developing its proposals.

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 13 three-member wards and nine two-member wards.

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 Hackney as presented.

8. East Dorset Council Size – LGCBE (12)67

It had been agreed to review East Dorset at the request of the authority. The review had commenced in December 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, eight 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 36 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 changing to 29 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted it was minded to support a council size of 29 members

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 29 be used as the basis for consultation.

9. Bromsgrove Council Size Post Consultation – LGBCE (12)68

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 of the 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 39 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 changing to 31 members.

At its meeting in March, the Commission had considered all the evidence it had received on council size. Given the change proposed, the Commission had decided to consult on the issue of council size. The Commission had sought views on a change in council size to 31 members. The consultation ended on 8 May 2012.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted it was minded to support a council size of 31

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 31 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

10. Kensington & Chelsea Council Size – LGBCE (12)69

It had been agreed to review The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea due to electoral imbalance. The review had commenced in January 2012. Based on December 2010 electorate data, 44% of wards in the borough vary by more than 10% from the average for the borough.

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 54 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 changing to 51 members.

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

Agreed

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

The Commission broke for lunch at 1.00pm and resumed at 1.30pm returning to Item 3 on the Agenda, deferred from the morning session.

3. Approval of Annual Report and Accounts – LGBCE (12)63

The Finance Director presented the Annual Report and Accounts for approval. NAO had requested that he expand the paragraph on page 12 (4.3 Financial Review) relating to the accounts provision to better reflect the settled position.

Susan Ronaldson presented the NAO's Audit Completion Report. She explained that, following discussion about the provision of costs relating to the restructuring exercise at the Audit Committee meeting in May, the NAO had accepted that while there was no accrued liability, it would be appropriate to make a provision, for termination payments only. This was on the basis that by 31 March the Commission had started to implement the changes with no realistic possibility of withdrawal. The Chief Executive had so represented the circumstances in the proposed letter of representation, included in the Commission papers. However, the acceptance of the provision required a technical qualification to the accounts because the control system required it to go against Annually Managed Expenditure, which the LGBCE did not have in its Estimate. This was set out in NAO's report.

Overall, she complimented the Commission on their processes and reported that there had been no other main issues or difficulties in the audit, which was indicative of the good quality of the Commission's accounts. It was agreed that there would be further discussion between Ms Ronaldson and the Chief Executive to ensure that the Commission's prudent action in making provision for re-structuring costs, which had caused the technical breach, was appropriately described in the NAO report..

The Independent External Adviser confirmed that she believed the accounts had been prepared well, and that their accuracy reflected a sound representation of the Commission's position.

Agreed

That the Finance Director would draft some further lines on the provision for the Annual Report and Accounts. The Chair and the Independent External Adviser to the Audit Committee, and the NAO, would comment on the re-draft. The Deputy Chair would sign off the redraft on behalf of the Commission.

11. Middlesbrough Council Size – LGBCE (12)70

It had been agreed to review Middlesbrough Council due to electoral imbalance. The review had commenced in December 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, 30 percent 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 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 the council size changing to 46 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted it was minded to support a council size of 46 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 46 be used as the basis for consultation.

12. East Lindsey Council Size – LGBCE (12)71

It had been agreed to review East Lindsey Council due to electoral imbalance. The review had commenced in December 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, 31 percent 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 60 members.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. It observed that the evidence submitted appeared to support a smaller council size, in the low to mid 50s, rather than the status quo as suggested by the Council. On the basis of the material provided, the Commission did not feel able to accept the Council's proposal.

Agreed

East Lindsey Council to be told that the Commission did not accept that the evidence supported their preferred figure, and to be asked to provide more information, so that the Commission can decide a council size determined by evidence.

13. Herefordshire Council Size Post Consultation – LGBCE (12)72

It had been agreed to review Herefordshire due to electoral imbalance. The review had commenced on October 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, 30 percent 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 58 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 changing to 54 members.

At its meeting in March the Commission considered all the evidence it had received on council size. Given the change proposed, the Commission had decided to consult. The Commission sought views on a change in council size to 54 members. The consultation ended on 8 May 2012.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted it was minded to support a council size of 54 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 54 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

14. Hambleton Council Size Post Consultation – LGBCE (12)73

It had been agreed to review Hambleton Council at the request of the authority. The review had commenced in February 2012. According to the latest electoral figures, 30 percent 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 representational arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support the council size changing to 28 members.

At its meeting in March the Commission had considered all the evidence it had received on council size. Given the change proposed, the Commission

had decided to consult. The Commission sought views on a change in council size to 28 members. The consultation ended on 8 May 2012.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted it was minded to support a council size of 28 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 28 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

15. Tower Hamlets Council Size Post Consultation – LGBCE (12)74

It had been agreed to review the London Borough of Tower Hamlets due to electoral imbalance. The review had commenced in October 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, 35 percent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with one 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 representational arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support the council size changing to 45 members.

At its meeting in March the Commission had considered all the evidence it had received on council size. Given the change proposed, the Commission had decided to consult. The Commission sought views on a change in council size to 45 members. The consultation ended on 8 May 2012.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted 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.

16. Gedling Council Size Post Consultation – LGBCE (12)75

It had been agreed to review Gedling Borough Council at the request of the authority. The review had commenced in March 2012. According to the latest electoral figures, 9 percent 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.

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.

At its meeting in March the Commission had considered all the evidence it had received on council size. Given the change proposed, the Commission had decided to consult. The Commission sought views on a change in council size to 40 members. The consultation ended on 8 May 2012.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted it was 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.

17. South Oxfordshire Council Size Post Consultation – LGBCE (12)76

It had been agreed to review South Oxfordshire District Council at the request of the authority. The review had commenced in October 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, 14 percent 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 48 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 changing to 36 members.

At its meeting in March the Commission had considered all the evidence it had received on council size. Given the change proposed, the Commission had decided to consult. The Commission sought views on a change in council size to 36 members. The consultation ended on 8 May 2012.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted it was minded to support a council size of 36 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 36 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

18. Vale of White Horse Council Size Post Consultation – LGBCE (12)77

It had been agreed to review Vale of White Horse District Council at the request of the authority. The review had commenced in October 2011. According to the latest electoral figures, 24 percent 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 51 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 changing to 38 members.

At its meeting in March the Commission had considered all the evidence it had received on council size. Given the change proposed, the Commission had decided to consult. The Commission sought views on a change in council size to 38 members. The consultation ended on 8 May 2012.

The Commission considered all the available evidence. On the basis of the evidence submitted it was minded to support a council size of 38 members.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 38 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

19. Review Programme – LGBCE (12)78

The Implementation & Programme Manager presented the 2011-2013 Review Programme quarterly update.

The Commission noted its content.

20. Project Plan Update (oral)

The Implementation & Programme Manager presented aspects of the new project planning process for electoral reviews. He explained that there had always been an internal process of setting key dates and milestones, but the

new plan formalised this aspect and provided a way of recording each step of an electoral review.

Key dates for lead Commissioners would be included in each timeline, and the plan would be forwarded to the lead Commissioner at the beginning of the review preliminary period.

Wherever possible, forward dates would be confirmed, but as some of the project planning would need to be done months in advance, dates set out in the project plan may change. Officers would minimise such changes and alert Commissioners to any changes as early as possible.

In the discussion it was stressed that the presentation had covered only part of the total programme and project planning requirements. It was important to consider other aspects beyond scheduling and that this would form a substantive item at the next Commission meeting and/or the Strategic Planning Event in August.

21. Future Business – LGBCE (12)79

The Commission noted the content of the Future Business paper.

AOB

The following matters were raised:

- a) An amendment to the Electoral Review of Northamptonshire County Council was presented to the Commission. This paper identified an error in the draft recommendations prior to publication and asked the Commission to reconsider the recommendations made for one area of Northampton Borough.

Agreed

That the Commission agree to the amendment to the draft recommendations for Northamptonshire.

- b) The Business & Committee Services Manager asked if the Commission meeting scheduled for 11 December could begin at 9:15 rather than 11:15. Members would be consulted about the matter.

- c) The Business & Committee Services Manager informed the Commission that she was investigating the viability of sourcing economical video conferencing capabilities to improve efficiency and would report back at a subsequent meeting.

15:15 Meeting Closed