

LGBCE (15)8 Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 18th August at 9:30am in Altitude 360, 29th Floor Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP

Commissioners Present

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

LGBCE Officers Present:

Jolyon Jackson CBE	Chief Executive
Marcus Bowell	Communications Manager
Tim Bowden	Review Manager
Alison Evison	Review and Programme Manager
David Owen	Review Officer (item 6)
William Morrison	Review Officer (item 4)
Paul Kingsley	Review Officer (item 5)
Dean Faccini	Business Assistant (minutes)

Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Lynn Ingram (Finance Director), Richard Buck (Review Manager), and Sarah Vallotton (Business and Committee Services Manager).

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 and Peter Knight declared an interest in Birmingham, both of which were referred to the Operational Report and/or Annual review Programme.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 14th July 2015

A clarification was agreed in respect of item 5 (Chair's Report).

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

1. Operational Report - LGBCE (15)77

The Chief Executive presented the operational report for August and the Commission noted its content.

Some errors on the timetabling of existing and forthcoming reviews were identified. The Review and Programme Manager confirmed that a revised version of the timetable would be circulated after the meeting to clarify the schedule.

It was also noted that:

- The review of Rotherham District Council would need to be added to the review timetable.
- The Chair would act as the Lead Commissioner for the South Cambridgeshire review pending the appointment of additional Commissioners.
- The desirability of aligning the scheduling of a potential review of the Isles of Scilly with the review of Cornwall would be investigated.

The Chief Executive updated the Commission on two recent visits. The first visit was at the University of Southampton where he discussed mapping and community identity. The second visit was from Professor Colin Capers to discuss the role of Councillors and Council size. Both of these meetings had provided useful contextual information for the forthcoming Strategic Planning Event.

2. Bexley Council Size - LGBCE (15)78

It had been agreed to review Bexley Borough Council at the request of the local authority. According to the latest available electoral figures, 10 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 decrease by 18 from 63 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.

3. Southwark Council Size - LGBCE (15)79

It had been agreed to review Southwark Borough Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 43 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.

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.

Agreed

The Commission agreed that a council size of 63 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

4. Warrington Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (15)80

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 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 8 two-member wards, and 14 three-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.

It agreed the Draft Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for Warrington Borough Council as presented.

5. Watford Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (15)81

The review of Watford Borough Council had commenced on December 2014. According to the latest available electoral figures, 33 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on December 2014, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 36 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 12 three-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.

It agreed the Draft Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for Watford Borough Council as presented.

6. Welwyn Hatfield Draft Recommendations - LGBCE (15)82

The review of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council had commenced on August 2014. According to the latest available electoral figures, 29 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on August 2014, the Commission had been minded to agree a council size of 48 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 16 three-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.

It agreed the Draft Recommendations as presented.

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council as presented.

7. AEA Report - LGBCE (15)83

The Chief Executive asked the Commission to consider his draft response to the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) report, 'Elections and Individual Electoral Registration'.

The Commission provided feedback and endorsed the broad conclusions of the draft response.

8. Agreement of Annual Review Programme - LGBCE (15)84

The Review and Programme Manager presented the Annual Review Programme.

It was noted that two of the authorities listed under the intervention criteria no longer met the criteria and, accordingly, were deleted from the proposed list. Also, Rotherham had already been agreed. Accordingly, it was noted that this now gave the capacity to undertake 11 reviews selected under the 'request' criteria. A revised list would be provided and on this basis the commission agreed to the proposals in the paper.

With the amendments agreed at the meeting, the Commission agreed to the proposed work programme for 2017/18.

Agreed

- The team was asked to draft a policy paper that would consider the implications of electoral cycles in respect of the scheduling of reviews going forward.
- The team was also asked to prepare a paper that would enable the Commission to determine how it might best discharge its responsibilities in respect of periodic electoral reviews and, also, to consider the implications of its powers in respect of Principal Area Boundary Reviews in the context of current discussions about devolution and the future landscape of local government. It was recognised that this latter matter would be an initial discussion piece and would need further discussion with other relevant stakeholders.

9. Chair's Report

The Chair reported that the approval of the new Commissioners remained in the system.

10. Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive outlined plans for the forthcoming strategy event which is taking place on the 25th and 26th August. There were four specific issues that the team had prepared for the event. They were:

- A common understanding of equalities.
- How might we develop warding patterns of our own?
- Council size: Lessons learned and how these might assist local authorities deepen their thinking about the issue.
- What are the components of a combined authority and where might that take us?

As well as those four issues, the event would also focus on:

- The role of the Commission and its strategic vision.
- The potential impact of change could have on the Commission.
- A summary from the Chair and an action plan.

Information packs and preparatory material would be circulated electronically and in hard copy to delegates in advance of the event. The Chair also requested that delegates brought with them the recent policy and practice review.

The Chief Executive advised the Commission that the Boundary Commission for England was gearing up for the forthcoming review of parliamentary boundaries and that it would be commencing its recruitment campaign shortly.

11. Revised Whistle-Blowing Policy - LGBCE (15)85

Sir Tony Redmond presented the revised whistle-blowing policy. This policy was one of several HR policy documents that had been identified by the Audit Committee as requiring a review. This revised version now had a more structured approach to the procedure which would help staff members feel more confident in registering a complaint.

The Commission endorsed the revised policy, although it was noted that additional thought might be given to the process when concerns resulted from external sources rather than from within the organisation.

In addition, although with this specific policy, it was suggested that consideration might be given to ways in which external sources might be able to alert the Commission to any occasion when the Commission had, intentionally or otherwise, been given inaccurate or misleading information that could impede its work.

Agreed

- For the Audit Committee to consider how 'whistleblowing' could accommodate those instances where the source of the allegation was external to the organisation.
- Consideration should also be given to ways in which the Commission might be alerted to misleading information being supplied to the Commission from external sources as part of the consultation process.

12. Future Business – LGBCE (15)86


The Chief Executive outlined key areas of business for the months of September, October and November.

Professor Paul Wiles suggested that, due to the large agenda of business proposed at the September Commission meeting, key agenda items should be switched to the beginning of the agenda. The Chair agreed and would raise this at the next agenda setting meeting.

AOB

The Chief Executive announced that the final relocation and back office project meeting would take place in September. A report of the lessons learned from both projects would be circulated to the Commission in due course.

Close of Business 11:50



Chair
8/9/15

