

## LGBCE (15)7th Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 14 July 2015, at 09:30am, in Meeting Room, 28<sup>th</sup> Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP

### Commissioners Present

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

### LGBCE Officers Present:

Jolyon Jackson CBE	Chief Executive
Lynn Ingram	Finance Director
Marcus Bowell	Communications Manager
Tim Bowden	Review Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Alison Evison	Review and Programme Manager
Sarah Vallotton	Business & Committee Services Manager
Mark Pascoe	Review Officer (item 2)
Karen Cleverly	Business Support Officer (minutes)
Harry Hodge	Work experience (observing)

### Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Dr Peter Knight.

### Declarations of interest

Alison Lowton declared an interest (referred to in operational report)

### Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2015

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

## Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

### 1. Operational Report - LGBCE (15)67

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

### 2. Birmingham Council Size - LGBCE (15)68

At the January 2015 meeting the Commission agreed to undertake an electoral review of Birmingham City Council on the basis of effective and convenient local government. This had been agreed in light of the review by Sir Bob Kerslake (now Lord Kerslake) into the governance and organisation capabilities of the City Council. The Kerslake review reported that effective and convenient local government was not being provided.

Subsequently, the Government made an Order changing the cycle of elections to all-out commencing in 2018.

Birmingham City Council accepted the recommendations made in the Kerslake report and these were underpinned by the establishment of an Independent Improvement Panel to oversee and monitor progress in meeting the recommendations. Having decided to undertake an electoral review of Birmingham City Council the Commission invited submissions on council size.

In response to this invitation the Commission received submissions from Birmingham City Council, the Leader and Executive on the Council, the Conservative Group on the Council and the Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel.

These submissions put forward proposals on council size ranging from 100 to no fewer than 120. Information had been received relating to existing arrangements as well as future governance and representational arrangements.

In addition to the submissions received other evidence including the Kerslake report and reports by the City Council to the Independent Improvement Panel were considered.

The evidence received included a paper from the Council's Leader and Executive which demonstrated that in implementing the proposals put forward to the Improvement Panel a Council size of 100 was the most sensible approach even though they had yet to finalise their precise operating model but that this would be defined by the implementation date of May 2018.

On the basis of evidence received, LGBCE officers judged that the available evidence pointed to a council size of 100 as being the appropriate size.

The Commission considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 100 members. It also recognised that the evidence already submitted demonstrated that a warding pattern which contained a significant element of three member wards was very unlikely to meet the statutory criteria. Unusually, therefore, in seeking submissions for proposed warding patterns following their minded to decision on Council size, they decided to make this clear in the invitation.

### **Agreed**

The Commission agreed that a council size of 100 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations and that groups and individuals intending to make a submission on a prospective warding pattern be advised that, on the basis of the evidence already available, any 3 member wards proposed would need to be individually and specifically evidenced by reference to the statutory criteria.

### **3. Process Review – FER – LGBCE (15)69**

A paper outlining current policy and practices informing the review process was introduced by the Reviews Consultant.

He recommended four areas where the Commission may wish to revisit current policy/practices - equalities, forecasting electorates, coterminosity, and council size. He invited Commissioners' to identify other aspects where there might be benefit in considering the appropriateness of current policy and practice. In so doing, it was stressed that current processes would remain unchanged until any formal decisions were agreed to move away from present arrangements.

Commissioners found the document very helpful and believed that (amended as induction appropriate in the light of any agreed changes) it should form part of the documentation provided for new Commissioners.

After discussion, the Commission agreed that the following areas warranted consideration:

- Creating warding patterns generally, including;
  - Coterminosity
  - Community identity
  - Numbers of councillors per ward
  
- The consultation process - balancing the weight given to different responses.
- Equalities
- Council Size
- Forecasting electorates
- A scheme of delegation.
- Decision on when to include an area in the programme.
- Timeline for Order-making
- Periodic Electoral Review – and the background strategic issues.
- The basis for responding to requests.

- Review commencement - definition.

### **Agreed**

That the Chair and Chief Executive would prioritise the areas identified above and establish a timetable and work programme to progress their consideration as part of the strategic event, policy workshops or Commission meetings.

## **4. Quarterly Review Programme Update – LGBCE (15)70**

The Review and Programme Manager presented the quarterly update on the Review Programme.

She requested Commissioners views on the programming of the following reviews:

- Harrogate
- Hertsmere
- Surrey Heath
- Taunton Dean
- Chichester
- Forest of Dean

During the discussion, attention was drawn to the need to ensure that the implementation dates for those local authorities that held whole council elections were not so far ahead as to undermine the review process. This might have consequences for the scheduling of reviews and for the potential 'lumpiness of work programmes. The latter might give an opportunity for a limited number of PERs if so desired.

### **Agreed**

The Commission agreed to delay the Harrogate, Hertsmere, Surrey Heath and Taunton Deane reviews. The timetable for the potential request reviews of Chichester and Forest of Dean would be discussed at the preliminary meetings with the authorities.

## **5. Chair's Report**

The Chair reported on the recent LGA conference which had been well attended. The LGBCE stand had attracted a large number of visitors who were interested in the work of the Commission. . The fringe session on 'one pass' reviews was well attended and well received. There was considerable interest in best practice and further workshops would be considered. An article on the Commission would appear in the next edition of Local Government Chronicle.

The Commission should ensure that its expertise and experience was accessible in the event that the Cities and Devolutions Bill led to requests for their input.

Commissioners requested that they be kept updated about the progress of the Bill. The Communications Manager would circulate an earlier update, and any further updates to Commissioners.

The Chair noted that it now seemed unlikely that a Speaker's Committee would be appointed before the late autumn and any necessary business might need to be handled via written procedures.

The Chair indicated his intention to raise the issue of aligning Commissioner's remuneration with that of BCE counterparts following the recent Review, believing that this was an appropriate timing given that he would not have a personal conflict of interest as he was standing down at the end of the year. It was noted that this was a personal initiative proposed by the Chair and not the collective view of the Commission.

The recommendation to appoint two new Commissioners had now been sent to the Secretary of State. The Chair would continue to monitor and report on progress.

## 6. Chief Executive's Report

The Speaker's Committee had regard to the recruitment pack for the recruitment of the new Chair. The advert was in the process of being cleared and would be placed this week. The closing date for applications will be 7 September 2015.

Areas where the Commission would benefit from additional technical assistance had been identified. Professor Ron Johnston and Professor Colin Copus had both been approached in this context, particularly with regard to forecasting.

The Commission's access to the Government Legal Service via the Cabinet Office had now been agreed.

The Chief Executive gave a brief update on the activity of the Boundary Commission for England (BCE), including the implications of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) overall allocations. He also noted the developing BCE GIS system. Recruitment would soon begin for the next Parliamentary Boundary Review, and job specifications were currently being prepared.

## 7. Finance Director's Report

### Qtr 1 financial projections & budget setting 2015/16 – LGBCE (15)71

The Finance Director presented the Quarter 1 Finance Report. There was a reduction to the budget of £200,000 compared to last year which would be met from savings from the relocation and back office project. The budget was still very tight and a meeting with managers would be held to go through the budget line by line. A cautious underspend of £25,000 was projected at this stage but there were risks attached. Careful monitoring would be required and

the framework for this would be developed further throughout the year. Going forward the overall budget would remain tight.

#### Relocation & back office services update

The Finance Director presented the latest update on the relocation and back office services project.

An internal audit on the project management approach had recently commenced and the outcome would feed into the NAO value for money study on the project.

A meeting had been held with the Chief Executive of Wavex to discuss the unsatisfactory performance of the IT service and outstanding issues. The response had been quite swift and, as a result, the remote desktop server was now operational. There would be a further meeting in two weeks' time to check progress against the action plan and, if this was not satisfactory, a timescale for improvement would be issued.

Legal advice had been sought regarding an LGA overcharge for business rates at Layden House that had taken place over a number of years. NAO had been informed, and this would be pursued. Any sums received as a result would be retained.

Commissioners raised the ongoing problem of being unable to open certain documents on iPads and email forwarding, and looked to the early resolution of these issues.

### **8. Strategic Planning Event – LGBCE (15)72**

The Chief Executive gave an oral report on plans for the strategic planning event on 25 and 26 August including the four main topics for discussion. These were:

- A common understanding of equalities
- Looking ahead - combined authorities and a potential future role of the Commission
- Council size – good practice
- Developing warding patterns – data, communities, equalities.

Discussions about identifying a facilitator were continuing.

#### **Agreed**

To circulate a paper on equalities (and others as appropriate) in advance in order to make best use of the sessions.

9. Commissioner Induction Process – LGBCE (15)73

The Review Manager outlined the plans for a new, more bespoke, Commissioners' induction process which had been based on feedback received from Commissioners appointed since 2010.

**Agreed**

The new Commissioners' induction process as outlined in the report and appendix.

10. Draft Audit Committee Minutes (June meeting) – LGBCE (15)74

The draft minutes were noted by the Commission.

11. Future Business – LGBCE (15)75

Noted.

12. Electoral review of Stroud District Council – Parish warding of Randwick Parish Council – LGBCE (15)76

The Review Manager presented a report on an anomaly in the Stroud District Council final recommendations relating to the allocation of parish councillors in Randwick Parish. He advised the Commission on the options available.

**Agreed.**

The actions outlined in paragraphs 10(i) and 11 of the report.

That the Local MP, the District Council, and the Parish Council be advised of the agreed approach.

**AOB**

The Chief Executive advised that all Commissioners would be invited to attend the inter-commission dinner on 17 November, but they would not be required to attend the meeting on 18 November, with the exception of the Deputy Chair who would attend on both dates.

**Close of Business 12:00**



CHAM  
2/7/15

