

LGBCE (11) 4th Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 12 April 2011, at 10.30am, in Room 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

Officers Present:

Alan Cogbill	Chief Executive
Archie Gall	Director of Reviews
David Hewitt	Director of Finance
Joan D'Souza	Review Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Timothy Bowden	Review Manager
Marcus Bowell	Communications & Public Affairs Manager
Sarah Vallotton	Business & Committee Services Manager
Alison Wildig	Review Administrator
David Owen	Policy & Research Officer
Kathleen Peacock	Business Support Officer (Minutes)
Arion Lawrence	Review Officer – Item 12
Simon Keal	Review Officer – Item 13
Lisa Siggins	Review Officer – Item 14
Alex Skerten	Review Officer – Item 15
Jessica Metheringham-Owlett	Review Officer – Item 16

Minutes from LGBCE's meeting on 8 March 2011

Apologies - No apologies for absence were received.

The Commission agreed the minutes from the 8 March 2011 Commission meeting as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

In response to a request made at the March Commission, the Director of Finance circulated a paper summarising the evolution of the LGBCE's resource expenditure throughout the 2010/11 financial year. The paper gave a comparison between the LGBCE's original budget estimate and the preliminary estimate for the resource accounts. Unaudited figures suggest that the LGBCE resource outturn for 2010/11 is approximately £2,487,000. The audited accounts would be presented to the Audit Committee and Commission once they were available.

Plans for the Commission's visit to Ordnance Survey in May were discussed.

Agreed:

1. Arrangements for the visit to Ordnance Survey in Southampton will be forwarded to Commissioners shortly.

SV

Declarations of interest

Dr Peter Knight, David Hewitt, Alex Skerten and Dr Colin Sinclair reaffirmed their interests in Staffordshire, Rushmoor, Rushmoor and Cumbria respectively. Commissioner and Officers also declared interests as appropriate, during discussion of Item 10.

1. Chair's report (oral)

The scheduled meeting on 9 March between the Chair, the Communications and Public Affairs Manager and the Rt. Hon Michael Gove MP to discuss the Surrey review had been cancelled. No other Parliamentary meetings had been scheduled to take place in March.

Jane Earl's appointment as a Commissioner came to an end on 31 March. The Chair took the opportunity to express his regret that Jane Earl would not be continuing in her role for a further term and to formally record his appreciation for her dedicated work as an LGBCE Commissioner and Chair of the Audit Committee and particularly for her support during the organisation's set up.

2. Chief Executive's report (oral)

The Chief Executive updated the Commission on the outcome of the recent Speaker's Committee meeting. The Committee approved the Corporate Plan and budgetary estimate for 2011/12 and were satisfied with the NAO value for money study. The Corporate Plan had been published on the LGBCE's website on 31 March and would be laid in Parliament during May.

The next visit to the Speaker's Committee would be in the Autumn when the LGBCE's business plan for 2012/13 would be submitted along with the latest budgetary estimate for 2012/13.

NAO would be auditing the LGBCE accounts at the end of April and clarity would be sought around the write-off of the LGBCE's start up costs.

A recent budgetary monitoring meeting had taken place with budget holders and the LGBCE's management accountant. The meeting revealed that the measures put in place to identify the costs of reviews by type and complexity were beginning to show results.

The Chief Executive attended a recent meeting with LGA representatives to discuss LGBCE's Layden House tenancy arrangements. The Commission has a five-year lease on the Layden House site which includes a break point at two years, allowing either party to withdraw from the contract from 1 April 2012. LGA officers would soon be vacating Layden House and the building would then be required by the LGA for business continuity purposes only. The possibility of the LGA serving the LGBCE with a 6 months notice from as early as September 2011 was raised.

3. Draft Statement on Internal Control (SIC) – LGBCE (11)40

The Director of Finance introduced the latest draft of the SIC, which would form part of the LGBCE's resource accounts. The latest draft had incorporated comments from the Audit Committee. The draft SIC would return to the Audit Committee in May for sign off.

Several minor textual amendments were suggested by the Commission.

Agreed:

1. Commissioners would forward any further comments on the second draft of the SIC to the Director of Finance by no later than 26 April.
2. Suggested amendments would be incorporated into the final document.

4. Commission meeting dates 2011 & 2012 – LGBCE (11)41

Commissioners were asked to confirm their availability for the proposed meeting dates in 2012.

Plans for the Commissioner's 2011 Away-Day were outlined.

Agreed:

1. Professor Colin Mellors gave his apologies for the Commission meetings on 10 May 2011 and 15 May 2012.
2. The Chief Executive gave his apologies for the Commission meeting on 12 July 2011.
3. Commission meetings following Audit Committees the evening before would commence at 10am.
4. All other Commission meetings would commence at 11am.
5. Meeting invites would be sent to Commissioners' outlook calendars where possible. **SV**
6. Commissioners were asked to provide dates in August when they would be available for two days for the 2011 Away Day as soon as possible so that a date for the event could be agreed. **SV**

5. Audit Committee appointments 2011/12 - LGBCE (11)42

In light of Jane Earl's departure, the Commission sought nominations for an Audit Committee Chair for a three year term. Sir Tony Redmond was duly nominated and seconded for this appointment by members of the Commission.

Agreed:

1. Sir Tony Redmond is appointed as Chair to the LGBCE Audit Committee until April 2014.
2. Professor Colin Mellors and Dr Colin Sinclair would continue in their roles as Audit Committee members until April 2014.

6.1 Annual Report 2010/11 - LGBCE(11)43

The Business & Committee Services Manager presented the first draft of the combined Annual Report and Resource Accounts to the Commission for comment.

The possibility of separating and shortening the two documents and adding more evidence on the organisation's equalities practices was discussed.

Commissioners also raised specific issues in relation to some KPI targets. The KPIs included in the document were those selected by the Boundary Commission in 2010 and were as a result, outdated. A working group had been formed at the end of 2010 to ensure the KPIs used were as reflective of the new review procedures as possible and substantial changes were subsequently made. The progress made against the updated KPIs would be recorded in the 2011 Annual report in April 2012.

Agreed:

1. Any further comments relating to the Annual Report and Resource Accounts would be forwarded onto the Business & Committee Services Manager. **SV**
2. A summary paper outlining the LGBCE equalities strategies and their effectiveness during the review process would be presented to the June Commission. **DO**

6.2 Review of the year 2010-2011 – LGBCE(11)43a

Commissioners found this a valuable paper and noted the content of the presented report, which summarised the Commission's achievements and progress throughout 2010/11.

The Commission commented that it would be useful to highlight in a table which local authorities included in the document, elect by thirds as this would add context to some of the quoted figures.

The strategies employed to gain positive stakeholder engagement throughout the Cheshire West and Chester review was discussed.

Agreed:

1. An article for publication in the trade press would be produced highlighting the positive stakeholder engagement experiences arising from the Cheshire West and Chester review. **MB**

7.1 External relations report – LGBCE (11)44

The Public Affairs & Communications Manager presented the external relations report and the Commission noted its content.

The possibility of carrying out a survey to measure the success of new electoral arrangements on areas that had been recently reviewed was suggested. The ideal time for this would be shortly after the elections in May, when the affects of the new arrangements would be fresh in the minds of electors and election staff. As the timeframe for carrying out this research was

very limited, one solution might be to work in partnership with an external research organisation or with the Electoral Commission.

Commissioners also suggested using a consultant to review electoral figures and the forecasts used over the last five years to see if lessons could be learnt from past experiences.

Agreed:

1. The Commission would discuss strategies to build on the LGBCE's external relationships as part of their Away-Day agenda.
2. A strategy for carrying out the research proposals suggested by the Commission would be formulated. **AG & DO**
3. A meeting would be arranged between the Chair of the Commission and Bob Kerslake at DCLG to discuss stakeholder engagement. **SV**

7.2 Summary of responses to Review Surveys

The Research & Policy Officer discussed the analysis of the responses to the opinions survey received during 2010/11. 60 responses had been received during the year; substantially fewer than the 150 responses received during 2009/10.

The responses had shown that some elements of the review process and respondents' engagement with it, generated higher levels of satisfaction than others; but more responses would be required to confirm any year-on-year trends. There was some discussion as to whether satisfaction surveys could be carried out during the course of reviews to help in reducing the influence of a review's outcome in stakeholder feedback. Further consideration about how we might improve response rates, and the robust nature of the feedback would be necessary, and it would be discussed at a future meeting.

8. Operational report– LGBCE (11)45

The Director of Reviews presented the latest operational report which contained an updated review programme for 2011-12 and an updated Operational Risk Register.

A data quality check had been carried out on the electoral data supplied by Plymouth University. The results of the quality check had revealed that there were significant differences between the data and actual local government election registers.

Forest Heath had now dropped off the review programme.

Agreed:

1. Plymouth University would be contacted with the results of the data quality check. **AG**

9. Future business – LGBCE (11)46

The Commission noted of the content of the updated Future Business Paper.

10. Requests for PABRs – LGBCE (11)47

The Review Administrator presented a summary paper detailing the PABR requests received since 1995 and from these the requests that could potentially be added to the review programme. The Commission were asked to decide which requests highlighted in the paper should be followed up by officers and agree the general principles outlined in the paper about which potential review types to pursue.

The Commission discussed the strategy to be adopted in cases where carrying out a PABR would result in the need for an FER. The possibility of encountering GLA constituency boundaries during the PABR process was raised. However as London Borough's would not be included in the programme for some time, no formal approach was decided upon for GLA constituency boundaries at this stage.

The Commission also discussed three specific requests in the Cambridge/South Cambridgeshire area, Saltdean on the boundary between Brighton & Hove and Lewes District and a request made for a type 1 PABR between Welwyn Hatfield and St Albans which affected approximately 9 properties. There were various approaches to the Welwyn, Hatfield and St Albans anomaly, which could involve several nearby dwellings, but Welwyn Hatfield and St Albans were supportive of changes to Franklin Close only. Written support for changes to the boundary around Franklin Close had also been received from the Rt Hon Grant Shapps, MP for Welwyn and Hatfield.

Agreed:

1. All authorities that had made PABR requests would be contacted to confirm if they were still interested in the process.
2. The Welwyn Hatfield and St Albans PABR would be progressed on the assumption that, at this stage, it would deal with only the Franklin Close boundary anomaly.
3. Brighton & Hove City Council and Lewes District Council would be approached with a view to progressing their PABR after the May elections and subject to agreement from East Sussex County Council.
4. A decision on a potential PABR for Cambridge City Council and South Cambridge District Council was deferred until each authority could provide a clear rationale for their decision to undergo a PABR.

5. London and metropolitan authorities would not be progressed in the current work programme.
6. Where an electoral review was scheduled to take place in the same area as a PABR, the team would investigate further to see whether the PABR could take place first.

11. Overview report – LGBCE (11)48

The content of the overview report was noted by the Commission.

12. Broxbourne draft recommendations – LGBCE (11)49

The review of Broxbourne Borough Council was being conducted on the basis that the 2009 electorate figures had indicated that 31% of its wards had an electoral variance of greater than 10% from the borough average with Wormley & Turnford having 23% more electors than the borough's average.

Broxbourne Borough Council has 38 councillors and elects by thirds. The Commission previously agreed at its November 2010 meeting that the review should proceed on the basis of a council size of 30.

The Council and Labour Group Office had both submitted warding patterns based on 10 three-member wards. Both proposals provided good electoral equality. The warding scheme prepared by the team was based on elements of both the proposals with some modifications in order for boundaries to be more easily identifiable. The scheme provided for good electoral equality.

Agreed:

1. To adopt the draft recommendations detailed in the report for Broxbourne Borough Council.

13. Staffordshire County Council Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (11)50

Dr Peter Knight did not take part in the discussion of this item.

The review was being conducted on the basis of the 2009 electorate figures for the Staffordshire County Council, which indicated that 42% of its divisions had an electoral variance of greater than 10% from the county's average.

Staffordshire County Council has 62 members, elected from 56 single-member divisions and three two-member divisions. The Commission previously agreed at its November 2010 meeting that the review should proceed on the basis of a council size of 62.

Three proposals had been received which suggested division arrangements for the entire county. These were from the County Council, and a local

resident, plus an unattributed scheme. The division pattern proposed by the team was largely based on a combination of the proposals received, with some minor modifications. The proposal was based on 58 single-member divisions and 2 two-member divisions. If the population growth occurred as predicted, the proposed scheme would result in 4 divisions having a variance greater than 10% from the county average by 2016.

Agreed:

1. To adopt the draft recommendations detailed in the report for Staffordshire County Council.

14. Rushmoor Borough Council Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (11)51

David Hewitt and Alex Skerten did not take part in discussion of this item.

The Commission was asked to consider the proposed warding arrangements for Rushmoor Borough Council, based on a Council size of 39 members as put forward by the Commission in November 2010.

The Council had provided its prediction for electorate growth within the Rushmoor area up to 2016, which was substantial in some areas. One borough wide warding proposal had been submitted by Rushmoor Borough Council based on 39 members and the team's proposals were based on this, subject to several minor amendments which better reflected community identity. The proposal was based on 13, three member wards and the proposed scheme would result in no wards having an electoral variance of greater than 10% by 2016.

Agreed:

1. The draft recommendations for Rushmoor Borough Council as outlined in the presented paper, subject to the following amendment:
 - The ward boundary between the proposed Fernhill and Grange Field wards, would follow Cove Brook rather than the M3 motorway around the Brookside Mobile Home Park area.

15. Gloucestershire County Council Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (11)52

The review of Gloucestershire County Council was being conducted following a request from Gloucestershire County Council for a single-member division review. Currently ten of the 53 divisions in Gloucestershire were two-member and the remaining 43 were single-member.

Gloucestershire County Council has 63 members. The Commission previously agreed at its November 2010 meeting the review should proceed on the basis of a council size of 53.

The County Council had proposed a 53 single-member division scheme which, in all areas except Gloucester City, had cross party support. Submissions had also been received on individual districts including a representation from the Member of Parliament for Cheltenham. The division pattern proposed by the team was based broadly on the submission of the County Council, but with a number of modifications. The proposed scheme would result in 4 divisions having a variance greater than 10% from the county average by 2016.

Agreed:

1. To adopt the draft recommendations detailed in the report for Gloucestershire County Council.

16. County Durham Council Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (11)53

The Commission was asked to consider the proposed warding patterns for County Durham Council, based on a Council size of 126 members as put forward by the Boundary Committee in March 2009.

In April 2010, as required by legislation, the Commission had sought updated electorate forecast figures for County Durham for 2015, five years from the projected end of the review at that time. These revised figures had significantly compromised the final recommendations agreed at that time and the Commission decided to place the review in abeyance until the 2010 annual canvas had been completed. A revised electorate forecast for 2016 had been provided by the Council and the team proposed new draft recommendations based on these forecasts.

The only significant changes to the Commission's previously agreed recommendations were in the City of Durham and its surrounding areas. Under the draft recommendations 10 of the proposed 63 divisions would have electoral variances of greater than 10% by 2016.

Agreed:

1. To adopt the draft recommendations detailed in the report for County Durham Council.

17. Swindon Borough Council Draft Recommendations – LGBCE (11)54

The Commission was asked to consider some minor amendments to the draft recommendations for Swindon Borough Council as agreed by the Commission in February 2011. The 2010 electoral figures provided in February were found to contain several errors during the audit process. A

slight amendment to the boundary between the proposed wards of Rodbourne Chenye and Haydon Wick was necessary in light of the amended figures.

Agreed:

1. The amendments to the draft recommendations for Swindon Borough Council as outlined in the presented paper.
2. The Audit Committee give consideration to internal processes to minimise the risk of a similar issue arising in the future.

AOB

There was a discussion regarding the Commission's approach to Council proposals for very large or very small numbers of members, which risked producing unworkable arrangements in Councillor numbers. A form of words for inclusion in the Commission's new electoral review guidance was agreed.

13.45pm Meeting Closed