

LGBCE (23-23) 9th Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 12 December 2023 at 10:00 am. All Commissioners and Officers attended the meeting via Teams.

Commissioners Present

Professor Colin Mellors OBE (Chair)
Amanda Nobbs OBE
Steve Robinson
Wallace Sampson OBE
Andrew Scallan CBE
Liz Treacy

LGBCE Officers Present:

Jolyon Jackson CBE	Chief Executive
Ailsa Irvine	Chief Executive Designate (Observer)
Kathryn Trower	Interim Director of Corporate Services
Hayley Meachin	Communications & Engagement Manager
Alison Evison	Review & Programme Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Richard Otterway	Review Manager
Jonny Ashby	Review Officer (item 6)
Paul Kingsley	Review Officer (item 8)
Nicole Holt	Review Officer (item 7)
Dean Faccini	Governance & Compliance Lead (item 15)
Rafa Chowdhury	Finance Lead (minutes)

Apologies for Absence

There were none.

Declarations of interest

Wallace Sampson declared an interest in item 3, Middlesbrough Council Size, and took no part in the discussion of that item.

Liz Treacy declared an interest in item 8, Derbyshire Draft Recommendations, and took no part in the discussion of that item.

Steve Robinson declared an interest in item 7, Worcestershire Draft Recommendations, and took no part in the discussion of that item.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 14 November 2023

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

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Actions from the previous Commission Board meeting

- Progression on Resilience & Retention - This has been deferred until after the relocation is determined.
- Fees and Expenses Policy – Meetings have been arranged with Commissioners.
- Review of website by ARC - Brief updates will be provided for January Board meeting on any immediate visible benefits from the website.

1. Chair's Report

The Chair formally welcomed Ailsa Irvine (Chief Executive Designate) who was observing her first Commission Board meeting. She would start in the Chief Executive post at the beginning of January 2024.

The Chair reported on the successful Inter-Commission meeting, which took place in Edinburgh on 7-8 December 2023.

The Chair noted that the Chief Executive, Jolyon Jackson, would retire at the end of December and that this would be his final Commission meeting. The Chair expressed his personal thanks and appreciation on behalf of all members of staff and Commissioners.

The Chair expressed gratitude to Richard Otterway for all of his contributions to the work of the LGBCE during his tenure as Review Manager. Richard will be leaving the Commission in December.

2. Operational Report - LGBCE(23/24) 095

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

- Surrey Heath – Surrey Heath Borough Council had requested an electoral review. The Commission Board carefully considered the request and the reasons underpinning it. They were also appraised of the last review by the Review Manager and advised that all available evidence had been fully taken into account in arriving at those recommendations. They were not aware of significant changes that had taken place since that review. In the circumstances, the Board did not consider that there were adequate reasons to undertake a further review so soon after the last one but would be mindful of the request when determining the future programme. The Chief Executive would explain this decision to the authority.

- Recruitment and staffing - Joshua Andrews has started his role as a Review Assistant. The recruitment for the Review Manager position would commence in January 2024, with interviews scheduled for early February 2024.
- The Chair agreed the following Lead Commissioner allocations:
 - Wallace Sampson – Oadby & Wigston
 - Wallace Sampson – Sevenoaks
 - Amanda Nobbs – Ipswich
- The Commission Board noted the Chief Executive's external meetings.

3. Middlesbrough Council Size - LGBCE(23/24) 096

Wallace Sampson left the meeting and took no part in the discussion on this item.

It had been agreed to review Middlesbrough Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 25 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent and one ward had a variance of over 30 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 46 members.

The Council made a submission proposing that the council size increase by one to 47 members. Following consideration of the evidence received from the Council about future governance and representational arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was insufficient evidence to support an increase in council size. Officers therefore proposed that the council size remain at 46 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 46 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 46 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

Wallace Sampson returned to the meeting at the conclusion of this item.

4. Swindon Council Size - LGBCE(23/24) 097

It had been agreed to review Swindon Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 20 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with one ward over 30 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 57 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 57 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 57 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 57 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

5. Vale of White Horse Council Size - LGBCE(23/24) 098

It had been agreed to review Vale of White Horse Council due to electoral imbalance. According to the latest available electoral figures, 33 per cent of wards/divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 38 members.

The Council proposed that the number of councillors increase by three to 41 members although an earlier proposal prepared by council officers had suggested retaining a council size of 38 members. Following consideration of information about future governance and representational arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was insufficient evidence to support an increase and that that the council size should remain at 38 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 38 members.

Agreed

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

6. Sefton Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24) 099

The review of Sefton Council had commenced on 18 July 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 5 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 July 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 66 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 22 three-member wards in total.

The Board 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 Sefton Council as presented.

7. Worcestershire Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24) 100

Steve Robinson left the meeting and took no part in the discussion on this item.

The review of Worcestershire had commenced on 21 February 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 29 per cent of divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 February 2023, the Board had been 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.

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 5 two-, and 47 single-member divisions in total.

The Board 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 Worcestershire as presented.

Steve Robinson returned to the meeting at the conclusion of this item.

8. Derbyshire Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24) 101

Liz Treacy left the meeting and took no part in the discussion on this item.

The review of Derbyshire Council had commenced on 21 March 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 20 per cent of divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent with one division being over 30 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 March 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 64 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 64 single-member divisions in total.

The Board 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 Derbyshire Council as presented.

Liz Treacy returned to the meeting at the conclusion of this item.

9. Wealden Related Alterations - LGBCE(23/24) 102

The Board considered the content of the Wealden Related Alterations paper. It was minded to agree to the related alteration as the changes proposed would ensure effective and convenient local government for county and district elections.

Agreed

The Board agreed to the making of an Order implementing the related alteration.

10. Cherwell Related Alterations – LGBCE(23/34) 103

The Board considered the content of the Cherwell Related Alterations paper. It was not persuaded to agree to the related alteration at this time since the electoral variances that would result would be considerable based on current forecasts. Additionally, the Commission is scheduled to commence an electoral review of the authority next year, which would be a more appropriate opportunity to consider ward boundary changes for the areas in question.

Agreed

That the related alteration request not be agreed.

11. ESRI Update - LGBCE(23/24) 104

There were no further comments

The Commission Board noted the report.

12. ARC Chair's Report on meeting of 4 December 2023.

The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee highlighted key items from the meeting that took place on 4 December 2023.

- Standing items covered including - Assurance Framework, Risk Register, IT Report, Health and Safety
- Internal Audit Reports – All received a substantial assurance
- The Committee approved the following policies:
 - Correspondence Handling Policy – subject to minor amendments
 - Correspondence: External Complaints Procedure
 - Freedom of Information
 - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Fraud Risk Assessment toolkit
- Review of effectiveness of ARC

- The Commission's Internal Audit Contract with TIAA, which is due to expire on 31 March 2024. It was agreed to extend TIAA's current contract for a further 12 months.

13. Relocation Update - LGBCE(23/24) 105

A short update was provided to the Board on the progress made to source LGBCE's next office space. The discussion involving all staff and Commissioners in October had helped identify space and configuration requirements. Initial conversations have been had with property agents, followed by several viewings of available office spaces.

The Commission Board noted the report.

14. Website Update - LGBCE(23/24) 106

The Communications & Engagement Manager and GIS & Data Officer provided an update on the new website's performance to date. A more detailed report will be presented to ARC in February.

Notable improvements of the new website include increased number of visitors and web sessions, automated processing of submissions, and a new and more efficient postcode function.

Commission Board Members made the following comments:

- Members were interested in the precise drivers for the increased number of visitors and web sessions
- How much of the website traffic is related to the review cycle?
- Was a more detailed analysis required, capturing more qualitative data?
- Is our website being accessed by hard-to-reach communities?
- How can we link this data with the customer satisfaction survey?

The Board expressed their appreciation for the informative report.

15. Risk Register - LGBCE(23/24) 107

The Governance & Compliance Lead introduced the report. Details regarding the Risk Management Group's November's meeting was provided.

Judicial review - No change was made to the current risk score of Possible / Major / 6 and to the trend status of 'Stable'.

Failure to have a resilient workforce - The group agreed to keep the current risk score as Possible / Major / 6 and the trend status as stable.

Agreed

The Commission Board noted the report.

16. Future Business - LGBCE(23/24)

The Commission Board noted the Future Business document.