

LGBCE (22-23) 01 Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 25 April 2022, at 09:30 am. All Commissioners and officers attended the meeting via Teams.

Commissioners Present

Professor Colin Mellors OBE (Chair)
Susan Johnson OBE
Peter Maddison QPM
Amanda Nobbs OBE
Andrew Scallan CBE
Steve Robinson

LGBCE Officers Present:

Jolyon Jackson CBE	Chief Executive
Lynn Ingram	Director of Corporate Services
Glynn McDonald	Communications & Public Affairs Manager
Alison Evison	Review & Programme Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Richard Otterway	Review Manager
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (item 8)
Ben Meredeen	Review Officer (item 9)
Dean Faccini	Compliance Lead (item 11 & 12)
Angela Hendry	Office Manager/HR Lead (item 13)
Rafa Chowdhury	Finance Lead (minutes)

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Declarations of interest

Susan Johnson declared an interest in item 2 Barnsley PABR and took no part in the discussions of that item.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 15 March 2022 and 17 March 2022

The minutes of these meetings were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendment to the minutes of the 15 March 2022 meeting:

- Item 16 Fees & Expenses Policy. Second line – ‘Fees and charges’ to be amended to ‘Fees and expenses’.
- Declaration of Interest – This section needs to be reworded to reflect that the DCS was present during the discussion of Item 15 Rewards and Recognition.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Actions from the previous Commission Board meeting

The following actions were reported on:

- Health and safety Policy – Going to ARC in November
- GLA – Further report to be presented to the Commission Board on Friday 29th April meeting.
- Universities and Electoral Reviews – October policy session
- Related alterations & consents – AEA have included this in their newsletter

Members commented that were several items from the March Board meeting that needed to be added to the Actions List.

1. Chair’s Report

The Chair provided an update on:

- Commissioners’ appraisals
- Discussions the Chair and Chief Executive had with DLUHC
- Reminded Board Members of the face-to-face policy session which is to be held in June.

2. Operational Report - LGBCE(22/23)001

The Chief Executive presented the Operational Report for April 2022 and the Commission noted its content.

- Related alterations and consents – There are two consent requests, which are currently being processed by the Team.
- Fareham – The Commission received a request from Fareham Council for an additional three months, to make their representation on warding patterns.
- Southend Council have requested a delay to their review by a year. The Team proposed to replace Southend with a review of Dudley Borough Council in the programme.
- Stockton-on-Tees – It had recently come to light that a submission and petition from a local councillor had not been considered when the final recommendations were agreed at a previous meeting. The Board were,

therefore, invited to re-consider the final recommendations for Stockton-on-Tees in the context of all submissions received during the consultation period.

- Derbyshire Dales – The team is seeking a meeting with the local MP to brief them on the matter regarding the South Darley area.
- Four-Member Wards – The Board were invited to agree the proposed replacement to the guidance on 4-member wards.
- Freedom of Information & Complaint – There is one outstanding Freedom of Information request and one complaint.
- Recruitment and Staffing – Ram Avtaar has been appointed as new GIS Officer and will start in the first week of May

Agreed

- 1) The Board noted the report
- 2) The Board agreed to Fareham Council's request for an extension of three months.
- 3) The Board agreed to delay Southend Council's review by a year
- 4) The Board agreed to replace Southend with the review of Dudley on the same timetable
- 5) The Board agreed the Final Recommendations for Stockton-on-Tees as presented
- 6) The Board agreed the minor amendments to the guidance on 4-member wards

3. Epping Forest Council Size - LGBCE(22/23)002

It had been agreed to review Epping Forest Council as part of the Periodic Electoral Review Programme. According to the latest available electoral figures, 16 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

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 that the council size decrease by 4 from 58 to 54 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 54 members.

Agreed

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

4. Basildon Council Size - LGBCE(22/23)003

It had been agreed to review Basildon Council as part of the Periodic Electoral Review Programme. According to the latest available electoral figures, 13 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 42 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 42 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 42 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 42 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

5. Harlow Council Size - LGBCE(22/23)004

It had been agreed to review Harlow Council as part of the Periodic Electoral Review Programme. According to the latest available electoral figures, 46 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with one ward being over 20 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 33 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 33 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 33 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 33 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

6. Castle Point Council Size - LGBCE(22/23)005

It had been agreed to review Castle Point Council as part of the Periodic Electoral Review Programme. According to the latest available electoral figures, 14 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 41 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 2 from 41 to 39 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 39 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 39 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

7. Brentwood Council Size - LGBCE(22/23)006

It had been agreed to review Brentwood Council as part of the Periodic Electoral Review Programme. According to the latest available electoral figures, 13 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 37 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 increase by 2 from 37 to 39 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 39 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 39 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

8. Southampton Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(22/23)007

The review of Southampton Council had commenced on 16 November 2021. According to the latest available electoral figures, 19 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent with one ward being over 30 per cent.

At its meeting on 16 November 2021, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 51 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 17 three-councillor 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 with amendments in the following areas:

- Swaythling and Portswood area

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for Southampton Council as modified.

9. Havant Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(22/23)008

The review of Havant Council had commenced on 21 September 2021. According to the latest available electoral figures, none of the 14 wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 September 2021, the Board 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-councillor 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 with an amendment in the following area:

- Hayling Island and Langstone area

Agreed

Draft Recommendations for Havant Council as modified.

10. Qtr 4 Finance & KPI Outturn - LGBCE(22/23)009

The Board received the Q4 KPIs and Management Information and complemented the team on the clarity of the information presented. It was suggested that it would be helpful to ensure the pie chart depicting the reasons for delays was consistent with MI 1B where delays had occurred for more than one reason. It was agreed that Audit recommendations should include both routine and operational recommendations going forward.

Finance: The Board noted the underspend of £109k. All adjustments have now been made - Leave provision has been adjusted for £24k in the current financial year and it is not anticipated that there will be further movement in the figures. The final accounts audit is currently being completed and the aim is to present the Annual

Report & Accounts for final approval to ARC and the Commission Board on Tuesday 17th May 2022.

Some presentational errors were noted in Table 1 (Financial Projections) which needed to be corrected.

Agreed

- 1) The Board noted the report
- 2) Further discussions would take place about the Pie Chart on Published Recommendations delay reasons
- 3) DCS would circulate amended version of Table 1 - Financial Projections.

11. Business Plan Outturn 21/22 - LGBCE(22/23)010

The lead officer for each item on the business plan gave an update on their respective projects for the financial year. Five projects were completed during 2021/22, with a further three scheduled to be finished by the end of the first quarter of 2022/23.

Rewards and recognition – Proposals have already been discussed with the Trade Union representative. Outcome of the project would be communicated to staff during the Team meeting on Wednesday.

Assurance Framework – Governance Assurance map is to be presented to Leadership Team next week and will be taken to the ARC Meeting in May for approval.

Improving external involvement – Process of identifying areas for improvement following analysis of customer satisfaction questionnaires is subject to delay due to Luis's departure and the arrival and induction of a new GIS Data and Information Officer. More details to be provided to Andrew Scallan, regarding involvement on Technical Guidance.

Future Working (Phase Two) – It was agreed that the next phase of this work would focus on how the lessons of the last two years could be captured in order to best underpin how the Commission might support its corporate objectives in future. It was suggested that it would be helpful to assess this through the three prisms of: Stakeholders, Staff and Commissioners and Efficiency.

12. Formal Approval of Risk Register - LGBCE(22/23)011

The Business & Projects Lead introduced the report. The work undertaken by the Risk working group in April was presented to the Board.

- Risk 2E – Review Programme Resilience – No change was made to the current risk score. Risk trend status was reduced from rising to stable. A new action was identified in terms of any future recruitment, in order to reduce the

burden, it would be sensible have job packs ready and decisions in place about where to advertise. It was noted that the large programme/workload posed a risk in terms of errors. Board members commented that this may need some reframing to minimise the risks and to consider the overall operational resilience of the organisation given the learning from Covid.

- Risk 1D – Failure to gain support from Local Authorities – There were no changes to the current risk score or trend status. It was hoped that the work of the improving external engagement project may lead to better submissions. A new assurance of collaboration with the Administration of Electoral Administrators (AEA) was added to the third line of defence. Members noted, however, that it was important that the collaboration with the AEA should not result in any loss of sight of the key role of the Electoral Commission.

Agreed

- 1) The Board noted the report

13. EDI Group Activity for 21/22 - LGBCE(22/23)012

The Office Manager/HR Lead introduced the report. External work focused on single and multi-member wards resulting in minor amendments to the technical guidance, the ongoing work about the 'digital divide', procurement, and the revision of the EDI policy.

Members asked about ways of attract a more diverse pool of candidates for advertised roles.. It was noted that, with every recruitment exercise, the HR Lead continues to do a report, which goes to Leadership Team, and this takes into account of where we advertise and how many candidates apply. The Commission rely on candidates completing the equal opportunities form, which is encouraged, but not a requirement. This enables us to get a sense of the various group's candidates represent.

Agreed

- 1) The Board noted the report

14. Council Size Research - LGBCE(22/23)013

Ed Hammond presented the results of Phase 2 of the Council Size research. This focused on the ways that Councils have sought to implement change, specifically through the objectives, process and outcomes of any changes.

Given the modest sample size, there needed to be caution in generalising from the research although the case studies included very valuable and detailed findings that would improve our understanding especially about ways of improving the quality and utility of council size submissions.

Overall, there were some common objectives, including: cost, more effective representation, political drivers, support arrangements and shifts in the Council's operating model. Some councils appeared better than others in moving away from a standard 'project' towards one that was more sensitive to the wider context and political dynamics associated with council size change.

Members had a full and detailed discussion of the research and thanked Ed and his colleagues at CfGS for their work.

Agreed

- 1) Chief Executive to have further discussions with Ed Hammond regarding publication of the Research Paper
- 2) Chief Executive to use the work in amending Council Size guidance.

15. Future Business – LGBCE (21-22)

Members requested for the Future Business to be in a format where they can continue to access it after meetings rather than it being time limited. DCS would discuss with the Business Team.

The work programme indicated that an additional Commission Board meeting would be needed in September. Chief Executive would liaise and confirm the date with Commissioners in due course.

AOB

There were no other items.

Close of Business