

## LGBCE (24-25) 12th meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2024 at 10:00am  
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:

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Ailsa Irvine           | Chief Executive                        |
| Alison Evison          | Review & Programme Manager             |
| Richard Buck           | Review Manager                         |
| Hayley Meachin         | Communications and Engagement Manager  |
| Jonathan Ashby         | Review Officer and Mapping Lead        |
| Tom Rutherford         | Review Officer and Review Process Lead |
| Brendan Connell-French | Review Officer (for item 5)            |
| Nicole Holt            | Review Officer (for item 6)            |
| Paul Nizinskyj         | Review Officer (for item 7)            |
| Yemi Fagun             | Review Officer (for item 8)            |
| Rafa Chowdhury         | Finance Lead (minutes)                 |

### In attendance:

Jane Earl                                    Observer (Board effectiveness)

### Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

### Declarations of interest

Wallace Sampson declared an interest in Middlesborough Further Draft and Final Recommendations (item 7), and took no part in the discussion of that item.

## Minutes of the LGBCE's meetings on 19 and 20 November 2024

The minutes were agreed as a correct record subject to an amendment to item 7 – Thurrock Final Recommendations to reflect that the Board agreed to rename the ward Stanford-le-Hope North & The Homesteads to The Homesteads & Stanford-le-Hope North.

### Matters arising

There were no matters arising

### Actions from previous Commission Board meetings

The following actions were reported on:

- BCE – nothing further to update since last month.
- Dignity at work policy – the draft policy has been updated to include a section on what a breach of the policy means, and the Board will be invited to approve the updated version later in the agenda.

### 1. Chair's report

The Chair reported on the Speaker's Committee session on 4 December, which was a positive meeting.

It was noted that there would be an informal discussion about potential implications for the Commission's work programme of the devolution agenda following the Board meeting.

The Chair expressed his thanks to all staff and the Board for their hard work over the course of the year.

### 2. Operational report - LGBCE(24/25)091

The Chief Executive presented the operational report for December and the Commission Board noted its contents.

- Minor adjustments have been made to the review programme relating to Stroud and Cotswold.
- Corporate planning – A draft version of the plan will be shared with Commissioners for comment ahead of a final version being brought to the Board for approval in January.
- Invoice balance for Windsor House – The Commission Board noted the difficulties that had been encountered by the Commission in addressing this

issue and supported the Chief Executive's decision to settle the final rental invoice balance for Windsor House.

- The Chair agreed the following Lead Commissioner allocations:
  - Andrew Scallan – Arun
  - Andrew Scallan - Knowsley

### 3. Wealden Council Size - LGBCE(24/25)092

It had been agreed to review Wealden Council as, according to the latest available electoral figures, 34 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 45 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 45 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 45 members.

#### **Agreed**

The Board agreed that a council size of 45 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

### 4. Ipswich Council Size - LGBCE(24/25)093

It had been agreed to review Ipswich Council given the time that had elapsed since the last review. According to the latest available electoral figures, 25 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 48 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 48 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 48 members.

#### **Agreed**

The Board agreed that a council size of 48 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

### 5. Colchester Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(24/25)094

The review of Colchester Council had commenced on 13 February 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 35 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 13 February 2024, 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-member wards.

The Board considered the recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the advice of officers and the submissions received, and was minded to agree them.

### **Agreed**

The Board agreed the Draft Recommendations for Colchester Council as presented.

## **6. Melton Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(24/25)095**

The review of Melton Council had commenced on 21 May 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 6 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 May 2024, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 28 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 4 three-, 5 two-, and 6 single-member wards.

The Board considered the recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the advice of officers and the submissions received, and was minded to agree them.

### **Agreed**

The Board agreed the Draft Recommendations for Melton Council as presented.

## **7. Middlesbrough Further Draft & Final Recommendations - LGBCE(24/25)096**

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

The review of Middlesbrough Council had commenced on 12 December 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 25 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with one ward being over 30 per cent.

At its meeting on 12 December 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 46 and had subsequently, on 21 May 2024, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 244 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all the submissions into account, for the reasons highlighted in the team's report, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations in some aspects, and these changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations and Further Draft Recommendations put to the Board for consideration.

The Final Recommendations and Further Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 8 three-, 10 two-, and 2 single-member wards.

The Board considered the Final Recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the submissions received following publication of the Draft Recommendations, and agreed them in principle.

The Board also considered the Further Draft Recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the submissions received following publication of the Draft Recommendations. It agreed to a period of further limited consultation on the Further Draft Recommendations, focusing on the areas of east, south-east and south-west Middlesbrough.

### **Agreed**

The Board agreed to a period of further limited consultation focusing on the areas of east, south-east and south-west Middlesbrough. The Board agreed in principle the Final Recommendations for the remaining areas of Middlesbrough.

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

## **8. Newcastle Upon Tyne Final Recommendations - LGBCE(24/25)097**

The review of Newcastle Upon Tyne Council had commenced on 16 January 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 31 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 16 January 2024, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 78 and had subsequently, on 18 June 2024, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 100 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, for the reasons highlighted in the team's report, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Draft Recommendations in some aspects and these changes were reflected in the Final Recommendations put to the Board for consideration.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 26 three-member wards.

The Board considered the Final Recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the submissions received following publication of the Draft Recommendations, and was minded to agree them.

### **Agreed**

The Board agreed to the Final Recommendations for Newcastle Upon Tyne Council as presented.

The Board agreed to the laying of a draft Order before Parliament giving effect to its final recommendations for Newcastle Upon Tyne Council.

## **9. Risk update - LGBCE(24/25)098**

The Governance and Compliance Lead joined the meeting and presented the risk report for December.

- Risk 4A: Failure to comply with equalities & diversity legislation - No change was made to the current risk score.
- Risk 4B: Legal challenge against Commission – No change was made to the current risk score; the target risk score has been achieved. Two actions had been identified: regular meetings between the Governance & Compliance Lead and the Electoral Commission's Facilities and Building Manager; and the creation of a formal procedural document to clearly outline health and safety responsibilities at the Commission, ensuring transparency and accountability. Board members discussed the appropriateness of the scoring and supported re-consideration of the scope of this risk as part of the forthcoming work to review the risk register.

The Commission Board noted the report.

## **10. Risk appetite - LGBCE(24/25)099**

The Independent Member of ARC joined the meeting and led a session on risk appetite.

Board members made the following comments:

- Risk appetite should not constrain an organisation; rather it should facilitate and provide a broad direction.
- The risk appetite should describe the organisation we aspire to become rather than the organisation we are.
- There is more to do to ensure that we embed risk appetite more visibly into our decision-making and that all staff in the organisation understand what our appetite is and why it is set there.

## 11. ARC July minutes - LGBCE(24/25)100

The Commission Board noted the minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee's July meeting.

## 12. ARC Chair's report

The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee highlighted key items from the meeting that took place on 25 November 2024.

- Standing items covered including the IT update, Health and Safety update, Assurance Framework and risk report. The Committee noted the work on an IT roadmap, which comes ahead of further work on a digital strategy for the Commission.
- The Committee approved the ICT acceptable use policy and health & safety policy, subject to minor amendments.
- The NAO audit plan and timetable was discussed, and the Committee raised their concerns around the significant increase to their audit fee.
- The Committee was updated on the planning process for the 2024/25 Annual Report and Accounts.
- An update was provided to ARC members on the Internal Audit tendering exercise and the records management project.

## 13. New policies

- Dignity at work policy - LGBCE(24/25)101

The Chief Executive presented the dignity at work policy which had been updated further to previous consideration by the Board in November.

### **Agreed**

The Commission Board approved the dignity at work policy.

- Menopause policy - LGBCE(24/25)102

The Chief Executive presented the draft menopause policy.

Commission Board members commented that it would be helpful if a short paragraph could be added to section 4, drawing on the content in the cover paper relating to the Equality Act and reasonable adjustments.

**Agreed**

The Commission Board approved the menopause policy.

#### 14. Vote on Account - LGBCE(24/25)103

The Interim Director of Corporate Services provided an update on the Vote on Account process. The Commission Board noted the report.