

LGBCE (25-26) 1st meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2025 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
Rachel Barker	Director of Reviews, Strategy & Engagement (designate)
Bipon Bhakri	Director of Corporate Services
Alison Evison	Review & Programme Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Hayley Meachin	Communications and Engagement Manager
Jonathan Ashby	Senior Review Officer
Brendan Connell-French	Senior Review Officer
Ram Avtaar	GIS, Data & Information Officer (for item 3)
Yemi Fagun	Review Officer (for item 5)
Nicole Holt	Review Officer (for item 6)
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (for item 7)
Dean Faccini	Governance & Compliance Lead (for item 8)
Angela Hendry	HR Lead (minutes)

Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Paul Kingsley.

Declarations of interest

Liz Treacy declared an interest in Manchester (item 3, 2025-26 review programme) and took no part in the discussion as it related to Manchester Council.

Minutes of the LGBCE's meeting on 18 March 2025

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

Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

Actions from previous Commission Board meetings

The following actions were reported on:

- BCE Commissioner attendance: Colin Byrne will attend the May Board meeting to observe how we work.
- ESRI Sweet demonstration: the timing will be confirmed shortly, potentially using some of the slot already in calendars for the June Board meeting.

1. Chair's report

The Chair reported on the Speaker's Committee meeting and the Board noted that the corporate plan and main supply estimate had been approved.

The Chair reported on recent meetings with MHCLG and with officials from the District Councils' Network.

The Chair reported that recruitment for replacement Commissioners to cover positions that will fall vacant over the next 18 months remains on track.

2. Operational report - LGBCE(25/26)001

The Chief Executive presented the operational report for April and the Board noted its content.

- The Speaker's Committee is beginning work to prepare for the recruitment of the new Chair, with a view to advertising in June and making an appointment in autumn.
- In respect of the Maidstone related alterations, the team confirmed that whilst the original report received by the Board had been correct, there was an error in the map. The team had liaised with GLD and an amendment Order had been made with the correct map. The Council is content with this outcome and the county council elections in the affected area can proceed on the intended division boundaries.

- It was indicated that if any Commissioner was interested in attending the LGA conference, they should notify the Chief Executive.
- It was noted that the issues about renewal of the licence to occupy and evaluation of the hybrid working policy should be seen as interconnected in the future.
- On the revised stakeholder survey, launched on 1 April, there was discussion around how we are promoting the survey and working to achieve higher levels of response. It was noted that this would be a challenge in Q1 due to the limited number of live reviews on which to seek feedback. Regardless, there will be an assessment of the new survey and its response rate at the end of the first quarter, following which there will be an update to the Board, including as part of the Q1 reporting on performance against our new KPIs.

3. 2025-26 review programme – LGBCE(25/26)002

The Review & Programme manager presented the paper on the 2025-26 review programme and the Board noted its content.

The Board discussed in detail the proposal to add three local authorities to the programme in line with the Commission's approach to undertaking PERs and intervention reviews:

- The Board agreed to add Doncaster to the review programme for 2025-26.
- The Board agreed not to review Manchester or the Isles of Scilly in 2025-26.

It was suggested that those authorities electing all-out in 2027 who also meet the PER or intervention criteria should be considered for inclusion in the 2025/26 programme. The Board asked the team to develop potential timetables for reviews in these areas – Darlington, Herefordshire, North Somerset and York – and to make initial contact with those authorities in order to assess the viability of including them in the 2025-26 programme. An update on progress will be brought to the May Board.

The Board also noted proposed work to assess how best to fulfil the Commission's responsibility for keeping the GLA constituency boundaries under review

The Board raised several points on wider programming matters, and further discussion will be scheduled on these for the September Board and LT away day:

- Optimum timing for review of those areas who elect all-out
- Considering the definition of, and rationale for a 12-16 year review time period
- Taking account of changes to housing targets and understanding the potential impact on intervention reviews

4. North Warwickshire Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(25/26)003

The review of North Warwickshire had commenced on 12 March 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 24 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 12 March 2024, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 35. However, after further consideration and on the basis of the available evidence, the team proposed that the Commission move away from its original opinion on council size and instead agree a council size of 37, since this provided for a better pattern of wards across the local authority.

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 3 three- and 14 two-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 Draft Recommendations for North Warwickshire Council as presented.

5. Sevenoaks Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(25/26)004

The review of Sevenoaks Council had commenced on 15 October 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 31 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 15 October 2024, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 48. However, after further consideration and on the basis of the available evidence, the team proposed that the Commission move away from its original opinion on council size and instead agree a council size of 47, since this provided for a better pattern of wards across the local authority.

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 7 three-, 12 two- and 2 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 Draft Recommendations for Sevenoaks Council as presented.

6. Cheshire East Final Recommendations - LGBCE(25/26)005

The review of Cheshire East 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 82 and had subsequently, on 18 July 2024, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 202 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 put to the Board for consideration.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 7 three-, 21 two- and 19 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 was minded to agree them.

Agreed

The Board agreed the Final Recommendations for Cheshire East as presented. The Board agreed to the laying of a draft Order before Parliament giving effect to its final recommendations for Cheshire East Council.

7. Thanet Final Recommendations - LGBCE(25/26)006

The review of Thanet Council had commenced on 12 March 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 13 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 12 March 2024, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 42 and had subsequently, on 20 August 2024, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 29 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 put to the Board for consideration.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 2 three-, 17 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 was minded to agree them.

Agreed

The Board agreed the Final Recommendations for Thanet Council as presented. In light of the Government's White Paper on English Devolution, the Board agreed to publish the final report but not lay a draft Order before Parliament at this time.

8. Board effectiveness review - LGBCE(25/26)007

The Chief Executive presented the Board effectiveness report and accompanying action plan.

- It was noted that the actions will be embedded in team plans to ensure their delivery.
- There was a discussion on the involvement of Commissioners, and a suggestion in the first instance to involve a Commissioner to help shape the areas on which feedback will be sought on the current review process.
- It was noted that the focus at the July in-person meeting will be on the review process, with further discussions at the September awayday on review programming and the other themes of stakeholder perception and engagement and our organisational fitness for purpose.

The Board agreed the action plan and next steps.

9. Formal approval of risk appetite - LGBCE(25/26)008

The Governance & Compliance Lead introduced the updated risk appetite statement, and the Board noted its content.

- Since that meeting the ratings of three of the five adverse rated categories have been revised to minimal.
- The health & safety definition has been refined to focus solely on physical safety and safe working environments, specifically mitigating risks against serious injury or workplace hazards.
- There was a discussion on the language used in the financial definition, and making a clearer distinction between the statutory duties of the Speaker's Committee and the internal processes to manage our finances.

Subject to refining the language in the financial definition, the Board agreed the revised risk appetite statement.

10. Q4 performance report - LGBCE(25/26)009

The Director of Corporate Services presented the Q4 performance report and the Board noted its content.

- There is a year-end underspend of 4% on core resource, even taking account of the investments made in areas such as SharePoint, design of the corporate plan and work on the IT roadmap.
- The KPIs to be reported on in future quarters will reflect the measures contained in the new corporate plan.
- In response to a question on annual leave, it was noted that the annual leave policy is due for review, which will provide an opportunity for consideration to be given to the approach to carrying forward leave.
- In relation to project spread and work to review its use, the intention is to take forward this work in 2026-27 as part of a wider exercise to understand better the costs of reviews.
- In response to a question on risk activity, it was noted that the intention is that ARC will undertake more detailed discussions and deep-dives on risks.

11. Annual Report and Accounts: update - LGBCE(24/25)136

The Chief Executive provided an update on progress with the 2024/25 Annual Report and Accounts (ARA).

- Work is continuing on a designed version of the report which will be shared with the Board so that they can see how it looks before the final version is brought to them in May for formal approval.
- In response to a question on the inclusion of information in the equalities section on relationship status, it was noted that this comes from the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010.
- It was noted that the Accounting Officer has determined that there is nothing that needs to be added to the ARA to reflect the incident in Harlow in 2022.

12. Commission Board workplan

- The agenda for June is currently light but the Board meeting slot will remain in the diary at this stage and a decision will be taken at the May Board meeting as to whether this is required. In any case, some of this space could be used for a briefing on ESRI Sweet.
- The July in-person session is now in the calendar. Details of the venue will be circulated shortly.