

LGBCE (25-26) 2nd meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 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
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
Yemi Fagun	Review Officer (for item 5)
Paul Kingsley	Review Officer (for item 6)
Tom Rutherford	Review Officer (for item 7)
Dean Faccini	Governance & Compliance Lead (for item 8)
Rafa Chowdhury	Finance Lead (minutes)

In attendance:

Colin Byrne	Observer (BCE)
Lucy Robinson	Observer (Work Experience)

Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of the LGBCE's meeting on 15 April 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:

- ESRI Sweet demonstration: the June Board meeting slot will be used for a briefing on ESRI Sweet, with the precise timings to be confirmed in due course.
- Stakeholder survey: the results will be included in the Q1 performance report for discussion in July, with an assessment of the performance of the new survey and response rates to be reported to the Board in August.
- Strategic discussion on review programming: to be included on the agenda for the September Board/Leadership Team away day.

1. Chair's report

The Chair welcomed Colin Byrne from the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) as part of Commission's MoU with BCE. The Chair also welcomed Lucy Robinson who was observing the meeting as part of her work experience.

The Chair reported on the recent District Councils' Network webinar on local government reorganisation.

The Chair also updated the Commission Board on the recruitment of new Commissioners, including that interviews are expected to take place on 5 and 6 June 2025.

2. Operational report - LGBCE(25/26) 012

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

- Since the last Board meeting, progress has been made on incorporating the agreed authorities into the 2025/26 review programme.

- The team has continued to develop and implement the offer of support the Commission can provide to authorities preparing for reorganisation. A guidance note has been produced and a dedicated webpage is in development. A dedicated inbox for questions relating to LGR has also been set up.
- Gatenby Sanderson have been appointed to support the Speaker's Committee with the Chair recruitment process. The advert is expected to go live in June 2025.
- The Chair agreed the following Lead Commissioner allocations:
 - Herefordshire - Liz Treacy
 - Bristol - Amanda Nobbs

3. Somerset Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(25/26) 013

The review of Somerset Council had commenced on 15 October 2024.

At its meeting on 15 October 2024, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 96 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 96 single-member divisions.

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 Somerset Council as presented.

4. Oadby & Wigston Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(25/26) 014

The review of Oadby and Wigston Council had commenced on 15 October 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 20 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 26 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 3 three-, 8 two-, and 1 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 Oadby and Wigston Council as presented.

5. Cumberland Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(25/26) 015

The review of Cumberland Council had commenced on 19 November 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 22 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 19 November 2024, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 55 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 55 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.

The Board agreed the Draft Recommendations as presented, with amendments in relation to the Workington area.

Agreed

The Board agreed the Draft Recommendations for Cumberland Council as presented, subject to modifications in relation to the Workington area.

6. Breckland Final Recommendations - LGBCE(25/26) 016

The review of Breckland Council had commenced on 13 February 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 33 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent, with one ward having a variance of over 30 per cent.

At its meeting on 13 February 2024, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 51 and had subsequently, on 19 November 2024, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 18 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-, 11 two-, and 23 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 Breckland 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.

7. Milton Keynes Final Recommendations - LGBCE(25/26) 017

The review of Milton Keynes Council had commenced on 12 March 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 37 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 60 and had subsequently, on 19 November 2024, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 115 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 19 three-, 1 two-, and 1 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 Milton Keynes Council as presented. The Board agreed to the laying of a draft Order before Parliament giving effect to its final recommendations for Milton Keynes Council.

8. Formal approval of new risk register - LGBCE(25/26) 018

The Governance & Compliance Lead presented the new risk registers.

Following the development of the Commission's new corporate plan, a review of the risk register had been undertaken to ensure alignment with the Commission's strategic objectives and the recently updated risk appetite statement. This has resulted in the creation of two distinct risk registers: a strategic risk register and an operational risk register.

Commission Board members welcomed the approach that had been taken and the progress made with establishing the new risk registers, and noted the further work that will be taken forward to refine these, including to populate the detail of the mitigating actions.

Agreed

The Board approved the strategic and operational risk registers.

9. ARC Chair's report - LGBCE(25/26) 019

The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee highlighted the key items considered at the Committee's meeting on 19 May 2025.

- ARC members had their annual meeting with the external auditors without officers present. The year-end audit was discussed with the NAO.
- ARC considered the annual report and accounts, along with the audit completion report and letter of representation, and were content to recommend them to the Board for approval.
- ARC discussed the internal audit report for 2024-25.
- The new internal auditors, MIAA, were also present at the meeting. The internal audit plan for 2025/26 will be presented to ARC for approval at the July meeting.
- There was discussion about the format of the review of effectiveness of ARC. Planning and delivery of the review will take place over the next month, with the findings to be discussed at the July meeting.
- The NAO are undertaking a study to illustrate the impact of the financial reporting and audit requirements on smaller public sector bodies. Findings will be published in an upcoming report that is expected to be issued in the summer.

10.ARC annual report to Commission Board - LGBCE(25/26) 020

The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee presented the Committee's annual report to the Commission, and the Board noted its content. The ARC Chair highlighted the section on priorities for the coming year and commented that though progress has been made on value for money and sustainability, there is still more to be done in these areas.

11.Approval of Annual Report and Accounts - LGBCE(25/26) 021

The Chief Executive presented the Annual Report and Accounts.

- There is one area of the ARA outstanding, relating to the pension figures that are provided by MyCSP. The Board agreed to completion of these being delegated to the Accounting Officer, with final review by the NAO.
- The Board approved the Annual Report and Accounts and the signing of the final version by the Accounting Officer.
- The Board approved the letter of representation being signed by the Accounting Officer.
- The Board expressed thanks to all the officers involved in the work on the Annual Report and Accounts and the year-end audit.

Any other business

Consideration of the Draft Recommendations for Somerset and for Cumberland had highlighted the inconsistency in terminology that existed in previous ministerial Orders between divisions and wards. Whilst the distinction was useful in a two-tier setting, it was potentially confusing in a unitary setting. Accordingly, the Board felt that this was no longer appropriate and, indeed, risked running counter to the notion that any new unitaries were new entities and should be regarded as such. The Board agreed that the Chair should formally raise the issue with MHCLG, to ensure consistency of terminology in the Orders establishing any new authorities, including those resulting from local government reorganisation

The Chief Executive updated the Board on the arrangements for the in-person Board meeting and whole-team session in July. A further slot will be identified in July to discuss review items.