

LGBCE (23-24) 10th meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 16 January 2024 at 10:00 am. All Commissioners and officers attended the meeting via Teams.

Commissioners present:

Professor Colin Mellors OBE (Chair)

Amanda Nobbs OBE

Wallace Sampson OBE

Andrew Scallan CBE

Liz Treacy

LGBCE officers present:

Ailsa Irvine

Chief Executive

Kathryn Trower

Interim Director of Corporate Services

Hayley Meachin

Communications & Engagement Manager

Alison Evison

Review & Programme Manager

Richard Buck

Review Manager

Yemi Fagun

Review Officer (items 3 and 9)

Mark Cooper

Review Officer (item 6)

Brendan Connell French

Review Officer (item 7)

Jonny Ashby

Review Officer (item 8)

Tom Rutherford

Review Officer (item 10)

Angela Hendry

HR Lead (minutes)

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Steve Robinson.

Declarations of interest

Amanda Nobbs and Andrew Scallan declared an interest in item 10, Surrey Final Recommendations, and took no part in the discussion on that item.

Amanda Nobbs declared an interest in item 11, Wiltshire Related Alteration, and took no part in the discussion on that item.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 12 December 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

- Action relating to fees structure – this specific action is closed but further work will be taken forward on the points raised in the individual meetings.

1. Chair's report

The Chair welcomed Ailsa Irvine to her first Commission Board meeting as Chief Executive.

The Chair noted the appointment of the new Local Government Minister, Simon Hoare MP.

2. Operational report - LGBCE(23/24) 108

The Chief Executive presented the operational report for January, and the Commission noted its content.

- Portsmouth Council has indicated in preliminary discussions that they wish to bring forward the implementation date of new electoral arrangements from 2027 to 2026. The Team is content with our ability to manage this change. The Commission Board agreed to include Portsmouth Council in its 2024/25 programme, with an implementation date of 2026.
- Barnsley Council has requested an extension of the initial consultation period by two weeks. The Commission Board agreed to the request.
- Sheffield and Barnsley principal area boundary review - DLUHC has confirmed that it will not now be possible to make the order in time for the May 2024 elections. The Board discussed the impact on the timetable for the Barnsley review.
- The Board received a verbal update on progress with the relocation project.
- It was noted that the April Commission Board meeting will be an in-person meeting, with a full Commission policy session. Commissioner availability will be sought for an additional virtual Board meeting in April to ensure there is sufficient time to cover the review items.

3. Newcastle Upon Tyne Council Size - LGBCE(23/24) 109

It had been agreed to review Newcastle Upon Tyne Council, as according to the latest available electoral figures, 31 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 78 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 78 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 78 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 78 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

4. Thurrock Council Size – LGBCE(23/24) 110

It had been agreed to review Thurrock Council as part of the periodic electoral review programme and as an intervention review. In doing so, it had also agreed to meet the request to conduct this review on an expedited timetable. According to the latest available electoral figures, 45 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 49 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 49 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 49 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 49 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

5. Cheshire East Council Size - LGBCE(23/24) 111

It had been agreed to review Cheshire East Council as according to the latest available electoral figures, 31 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 82 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 82 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 82 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 82 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

6. Gateshead Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24) 112

The review of Gateshead Council had commenced on 15 August 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 14 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 15 August 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 66, and the Draft Recommendations 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.

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 support them.

Agreed

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

7. Solihull Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24) 113

The review of Solihull Council had commenced on 15 August 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 12 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 15 August 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 51, and the Draft Recommendations 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 support them.

Agreed

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

8. Walsall Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24) 114

The review of Walsall Council had commenced on 15 August 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 20 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 15 August 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 60 and the Draft Recommendations 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 20 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 support them.

Agreed

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

9. Staffordshire Final Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24) 115

The review of Staffordshire County Council had commenced on 13 December 2022. According to the latest available electoral figures, 13 per cent of electoral divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent with one division (Keele, Knutton & Silversale) having a variance over 30 per cent.

At its meeting on 13 December 2022, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 62. On 18 July 2023, the Board agreed Draft Recommendations. The Commission had agreed to undertake this as a single-member division review.

Following publication of the Draft Recommendations, 71 submissions had been received, which were 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 and Further Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 62 single-member divisions.

The Board considered the 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 focusing on the area of Lichfield, and agreed in principle the Final Recommendations for remaining areas of the county.

Agreed

The Board agreed to a period of further limited consultation focusing on the area of Lichfield, and agreed in principle the Final Recommendations for the remaining areas of the county.

10. Surrey Final Recommendations – LGBCE(23/34) 116

Andrew Scallan and Amanda Nobbs left the meeting and took no part in the discussion on this item.

The review of Surrey County Council had commenced on 21 February 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 16 per cent of electoral 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 81. On 18 July 2023, the Board agreed Draft Recommendations. The Commission had agreed to undertake this as a single-member division review.

Following publication of the Draft Recommendations, 820 submissions had been received, which were 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 and Further Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 1 two- and 79 three-member divisions.

The Board considered the 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 focusing on the area of Elmbridge, and agreed in principle the Final Recommendations for the remaining areas of the county.

Agreed

The Board agreed to a period of further limited consultation focusing on the area of Elmbridge, and agreed in principle the Final Recommendations for the remaining areas of the county.

Andrew Scallan returned to the meeting at the conclusion of this item.

11. Wiltshire Related Alterations - LGBCE(23/24) 117

Amanda Nobbs took no part in the discussion on this item.

The Board considered the content of the Wiltshire Council Related Alterations paper. It was minded to agree to the related alterations, as the changes proposed would retain a good level of electoral equality, reflect community identities and aid effective and convenient local government.

Agreed

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

Amanda Nobbs returned to the meeting at the conclusion of this item.

12. Qtr 3 Finance & KPI – LGBCE (23/24) 118

The Director of Corporate Services presented the KPI and finance report, and the Board discussed its content.

- It was noted that MI 3A, recruitment time, is amber due to a conscious decision to allow a candidate additional time to make a decision on a job offer from us.
- On MI 3C, weighted staff turnover, it was noted that the DCS, Chief Executive and Review Manager are all high-weighted roles, the changes in which over the year have resulted in the current score. The impact has been proactively managed through the recruitment and induction processes.
- On MI 3D, training plans, the DCS updated that we have 100% completion on the GDPR mandatory training which the staff team has recently undertaken, and are planning the IT Security mandatory training which will take place in the last quarter of this financial year.
- The Commission Board discussed MI 1B, delayed final recommendations, and considered that it would be useful to have a breakdown of the reasons for the delays, recognising that there are both internal and external reasons for these, to understand better whether further action is needed to reduce delays.
- The Chief Executive highlighted the intention to carry out work on the KPIs and MI before the start of the next financial year, to ensure we are measuring the appropriate things. It was noted that we should also consider the impact of a general election on our review programme and what this might mean for our performance.
- On finance, the Board noted the projected resource underspend of £78k and capital underspend of £17k.
- There was a question about mapping costs, in response to which it was noted that we have done a number of reviews of two-tier counties this year, which result in higher mapping costs.

13. Final draft corporate plan - LGBCE(23/24) 119

The Chief Executive introduced the draft corporate plan, and provided an overview of how work on it had progressed further to the discussion on an earlier draft at the November Board meeting.

The Board discussed the overall approach and tone, and proposed several minor amendments to the text, including the addition of more explicit lines on equality, diversity and inclusion.

Subject to the amendments proposed being completed, the Commission Board agreed the final draft corporate plan.

14. Strategic finance update, including VOA & Main Supply Estimate – LGBCE(23/24) 120

The DCS presented the strategic finance update.

- The Commission Board noted the Vote on Account, which will be laid at the beginning of February 2024.
- The Board agreed the principles included in the Main Supply Estimate (MSE) and the overall movement from 2023/24.
- The Commission Board requested that we consider alignment of pay award and inflation percentages with those being used by the Electoral Commission in their MSE.
- The Board asked for a reduction in the amount allocated to the hosting of the UK Boundary Commissions' meeting.

Subject to these points being addressed, the Board agreed the MSE, enabling its submission to Treasury for checking ahead of formal submission to the Speaker's Committee in February.

15. Draft ARC December minutes - LGBCE(23/24) 121

The Commission Board noted the draft ARC December minutes. The Board also noted the extension of the contract for the internal auditors for a further year.

16. Future business - LGBCE(23/24)

The Commission Board noted the future business document.