

LGBCE (23-24) 12th meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 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
Kathryn Trower	Interim Director of Corporate Services (items 12 to 19)
Hayley Meachin	Communications & Engagement Manager
Alison Evison	Review & Programme Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Tom Rutherford	Review Officer
Paul Kingsley	Review Officer (item 9)
Brendan Connell-French	Review Officer (item 10)
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (item 11)
Dean Faccini	Governance & Compliance Lead (item 14)
Angela Hendry	HR Lead (minutes)

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Kathryn Trower for items 1 to 11.

Declarations of interest

Ailsa Irvine declared an interest in item 8, Uttlesford Related Alteration, and took no part in the discussion of that item.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 13 February 2024

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

The Commission Board noted the outstanding actions, which all have a due date later in the year.

1. Chair's report

The Chair reported on the Speaker's Committee session on 6 March, which was a positive meeting. The Board noted that the Speaker's Committee have approved the main supply estimate as submitted.

2. Operational report - LGBCE(23/24)132

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

- Barnsley electoral review – The Commission Board supported the recommended approach set out in the report.
- Bradford electoral review - The Commission Board agreed the proposal to delay consideration of the final recommendations for Bradford by one month.
- West Oxfordshire electoral review - The Commission Board agreed to delay the start of the West Oxfordshire electoral review by 3 months.
- The Commission Board noted the additional responsibilities taken on by two Review Officers.

3. North West Leicestershire Council Size - LGBCE(23/24)133

It had been agreed to review North West Leicestershire Council as, according to the latest available electoral figures, 39 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 38 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 38 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 38 members. The Board noted the request from the Council that this be a single-member ward review.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 38 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations. The Board agreed that this would be a single-member ward review.

4. Milton Keynes Council Size - LGBCE(23/24)134

It had been agreed to review Milton Keynes Council as, according to the latest available electoral figures, 37 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 57 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 3 from 57 to 60 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 60 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 60 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

5. Bromsgrove Council Size - LGBCE(23/24)135

It had been agreed to review Bromsgrove Council as, according to the latest available electoral figures, 27 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 31 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 31 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 31 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 31 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

6. North Warwickshire Council Size - LGBCE(23/24)136

It had been agreed to review North Warwickshire Council as part of the periodic electoral review programme. According to the latest available electoral figures, 24 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 35 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 35 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 35 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 35 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

7. Thanet Council Size – LGBCE(23-24)137

It had been agreed to review Thanet 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 56 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 14 from 56 to 42 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, 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.

8. Uttlesford Related Alteration - LGBCE(23/24)138

Ailsa Irvine left the meeting and took no part in the discussion on this agenda item.

The Board considered the content of the Uttlesford District Council Related Alterations paper. It was minded to agree to the related alteration as the changes proposed would ensure coterminosity between the division, ward and revised parish boundaries. The changes would also support an effective outcome in the ongoing Essex electoral review.

Agreed

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

Ailsa Irvine returned to the meeting.

9. South Tyneside New Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24)139

The review of South Tyneside Council had commenced on 18 April 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 22 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 April 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 54 and Draft Recommendations were prepared on the basis of such a council size. On 19 September 2023, the Board agreed the Draft Recommendations.

At its meeting on 13 February 2024, in light of an error in the electorate forecast pro-forma published on the Commission's website which was found during the Draft Recommendations consultation, the Board agreed to consider New Draft Recommendations for South Tyneside in March 2024.

In preparing the draft scheme, the team had taken into consideration both the submissions it had received and the statutory criteria. The New Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 18 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 New Draft Recommendations for South Tyneside as presented.

10. Gloucestershire Final Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24)140

The review of Gloucestershire Council had commenced on 21 March 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 32 per cent of divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 21 March 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 55 and had subsequently, on 19 September 2023, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 272 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 55 single-member divisions.

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

11. Coventry Final Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24)141

The review of Coventry Council had commenced on 16 May 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 33 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 16 May 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 54 and had subsequently, on 17 October 2023, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 83 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 18 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 the Final Recommendations for Coventry as presented. The Board agreed to the laying of a draft Order before Parliament giving effect to its final recommendations for Coventry Council.

12. Relocation business case – LGBCE(23-24)142

The Chief Executive presented the relocation business case. The Commission Board discussed the proposal recommending moving the Commission's offices to Bunhill Row. Particular attention was paid to the process that had led to the location as the preferred outcome, the criteria that had been applied, and potential layout of the new space.

The Interim Director of Corporate Services gave a brief summary of the preparations that had begun for moving. There was some discussion around dilapidation costs for Windsor House, and it was noted that we are still awaiting a response from the GPA on this. There is a meeting with the GPA on 18 March where the timeline for moving out of Windsor House will also be discussed.

Agreed

The Commission Board agreed the recommendation to proceed with the Bunhill Row (Electoral Commission) option.

13. Staff survey – LGBCE(23-24)143

The Interim Director of Corporate Services presented the headlines from the staff survey and the Commission Board noted the findings.

- The Board welcomed the 30% improvement in employee engagement scores.
- Learning & Development scores have improved by 22%, which likely reflects investment over the last year in training & development which is now more closely linked to the appraisal process.
- The pay & benefits score has improved, which may be related to the 4.5% pay award and the non-consolidated payment made in 2023/24.

The Board were pleased with the overall results of the survey and noted the next steps identified by the Leadership Team. They thanked the interim Director of Corporate Services and the HR Lead for their work in compiling the findings and the clarity of the report.

14. Risk – LGBCE(23-24)144

The Governance and Compliance Lead presented the risk report.

- Inadequate engagement from local authorities:
The Risk Management Group had considered this risk alongside the risk Failure to gain support for local authorities, and had agreed to return to review both risks in tandem as a deep dive in March.
- Information security & management:

The Risk Management Group had discussed whether to reduce the risk score and had agreed to keep it as is for now, but to review this again once the Commission has moved to new premises.

- The Board discussed including mitigations to move corporate manslaughter from possible to unlikely, and it was noted that work relating to this is ongoing.

15. ARC Chair's report

The Chair of ARC gave an update on the meeting which took place on 26 February 2024.

- The action relating to skills and competencies for ARC members will be dealt with through the appraisal process for members.
- The Committee considered the assurance framework.
- The Committee received an update on IT performance, and noted that further work is to be undertaken on a digital strategy for the Commission.
- Discussions began on the internal audit plan for 2024/25, and the Committee also noted the timetable for tendering for new internal auditors for 2025/26 onwards.
- The year-end audit plan was discussed, and the Committee raised their concerns with the NAO on the significant increase to the audit fee, which had only been confirmed after the main supply estimate had been submitted.
- A report on the functions of the Remuneration Committee was considered, and was referred to the Commission Board for decision.
- A review of the website was presented, and the analysis of data provided a positive picture.

16. Remuneration Committee – LGBCE(23-24)145

The Interim Director of Corporate Services introduced the report on the Remuneration Committee. This report had been considered by ARC at their meeting in February 2024.

It was noted that the Remuneration Committee had not met during 2023-24. The Board also noted that they had agreed to set up a sub-committee for the recruitment of the Chief Executive, which had been involved in the agreement of the salary.

The Board discussed potential conflicts of interest should the Remuneration Committee be disbanded, and how this could be avoided.

Agreed

The Board agreed to disband the current Remuneration Committee, and for a new Remuneration Committee to be established, made up of all Board members but with its own chair and specific remit and decision-making powers.

17. Fees and expenses policy – LGBCE(23-24)146

The Interim Director of Corporate Services introduced the update to the fees and expenses policy, which was due for review. The report had also been considered by ARC at their meeting in February 2024.

It was noted that the version of the reviewed policy in the pack did not have the correct fees listed, due to a SharePoint error. This will be corrected before publication of the revised policy in the policy library on SharePoint.

There was a discussion about the length of day and why it had been set at eight hours; however, no changes were agreed at this time.

The Board noted the clarification where more than one discrete activity is carried out in a single day.

An amendment has been made to the review matrix to reflect that tours (virtual and physical) can take place at both the draft and final recommendation stages of a review.

Agreed

The Board agreed the expenses policy, and the associated fee levels as proposed by the Interim Director of Corporate Services. The Board agreed to consider an approach to reviewing the broader fees structure for Commissioners at the November 2024 Board meeting.

18. Future business - LGBCE(23/24)

The Commission Board noted the future business document.