

LGBCE (23-24) 11th meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2024 at 10:00am. All Commissioners and officers attended the meeting via Teams.

Commissioners present:

Professor Colin Mellors OBE (Chair)
Amanda Nobbs OBE (items 1 to 6)
Steve Robinson
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
Paul Nizinskyj	Review Officer (items 6 and 9)
Nicole Holt	Review Officer (item 7)
Yemi Fagun	Review Officer (item 8)
Dean Faccini	Governance & Compliance Lead (item 10)
Rafa Chowdhury	Finance Lead (minutes)

Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence. Amanda Nobbs would have to leave the meeting at 12pm.

Declarations of interest

Colin Mellors and Wallace Sampson declared an interest in item 7, Kirklees Draft Recommendations, and took no part in the discussion of that item.

Ailsa Irvine and Alison Evison declared an interest in item 2, Operational Report in relation to Uttlesford/Essex Related Alteration, and took no part in the discussion of that part of that item.

Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 16 January 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 following actions were reported on:

- Impact of removal of EU electors from electoral registers – complete; further updates would be included in operational reports
- Ensure templates and their use clearly and consistently highlight elector/councillor ratio – complete
- Team to consider how we manage the process throughout the council size stage to support the submission of quality submissions – initial discussion had taken place at the Review Practitioners' Forum; a more detailed session has now been arranged between the Chief Executive and Review Managers to further explore opportunities to promote consistent engagement

1. Chair's report

The Chair recorded his thanks to staff and colleagues who organised and attended the whole team training sessions earlier in the month.

The Chair, Chief Executive and Interim Director of Corporate Services are due to meet with the Speaker's Committee in March. The Board were updated on progress with submitting the Main Supply Estimate, further to the receipt of advice from HM Treasury.

2. Operational report - LGBCE(23/24)122

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

Ailsa Irvine and Alison Evison left the meeting and took no part in the discussion of the Essex item.

- Essex – The Board agreed to consider the Related Alterations request from Uttlesford District Council at its March 2024 meeting.

Ailsa Irvine and Alison Evison returned to the meeting.

- The Chair agreed Lead Commissioners for the following reviews:
 - Steve Robinson – West Oxfordshire
 - Steve Robinson – Cotswold
 - Wallace Sampson – Portsmouth
 - Andrew Scallan – Wealden
- South Tyneside – in light of an error found in the electorate forecast pro-forma published on the Commission’s website, the Board agreed to consider new draft recommendations for South Tyneside in March, and for consultation on these to be commenced in May 2024. The Board noted that the team would analyse the process to discover how the issue had arisen in order to enable mitigating actions to be identified and taken forward to avoid similar issues arising in the future. The Board also endorsed the team’s plan to undertake a more comprehensive review of the overall review process, which will include consideration of the checks and quality assurance measures in our internal processes.

3. Colchester Council Size - LGBCE(23/24)123

It had been agreed to review Colchester Council as, according to the latest available electoral figures, 35 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 51 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 51 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 51 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 51 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

4. Breckland Council Size - LGBCE(23/24)124

It had been agreed to review Breckland Council as, according to the latest available electoral figures, 33 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 increase by 2, from 49 to 51 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 51 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 51 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

5. Bassetlaw Council Size - LGBCE(23/24)125

It had been agreed to review Bassetlaw Council as part of the periodic electoral review programme and as, according to the latest available electoral figures, 28 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.

6. Oxfordshire Further Draft & Final Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24)126

The review of Oxfordshire County Council had commenced on 20 February 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 34 per cent of divisions had variances greater than 10 per cent, with eight having a variance outside of 20% and two outside of 30%.

At its meeting on 20 February 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 69 and subsequently, on 19 September 2023, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 41 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations, 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 Further Draft and Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 69 single-member divisions.

The Board considered the Further Draft and Final 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 areas of Cherwell and Vale of White Horse, 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 areas of Cherwell and Vale of White Horse, and agreed in principle the Final Recommendations for the remaining areas of the county.

Amanda Nobbs left the meeting

7. Kirklees Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24)127

Colin Mellors and Wallace Sampson left the meeting and took no part in the discussion on this item. The Deputy Chair, Andrew Scallan chaired this item.

The review of Kirklees Council had commenced on 19 September 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 13 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 19 September 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 69 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 23 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 Kirklees Council as presented.

Colin Mellors and Wallace Sampson returned to the meeting at the conclusion of this item.

8. Canterbury Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24)128

The review of Canterbury Council had commenced on 19 September 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 67 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 19 September 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 39. However, as a result of further consideration and on the basis of the evidence now available, the Commission agreed to move away from its original opinion on council size and instead agreed to a council size of 40 since this allowed for a better warding pattern.

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-, 11 two-, and 9 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 support them.

Agreed

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

9. Sunderland New Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24)129

The review of Sunderland Council had commenced on 18 April 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 20 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 75 and subsequently, on 19 September 2023, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 274 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations, which were considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all the submissions into account and, for the reasons highlighted in the team's report, it was felt that there was sufficient evidence to publish a set of New Draft Recommendations covering the whole council area for consultation.

The New Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 25 three-member wards.

The Board considered the New Draft 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 support them.

Agreed

The Board agreed the New Draft Recommendations for Sunderland Council as presented.

10. Risk register - LGBCE(23/24)130

The Governance & Compliance Lead introduced the report. An update was provided on the Risk Management Group's January meeting.

- Failure to gain support from the local authority - The group agreed to keep the current risk score as Possible / Major / 6 but an action was identified to carry out a deep-dive review of risk 3B Inadequate engagement from local authorities at the next Risk Management Group meeting.
- Failure of external contracts and business systems - The group agreed to keep the current risk score as Unlikely / Catastrophic / 4 and the trend status as stable.

Agreed

The Commission Board noted the report

11. Relocation - LGBCE(23/24)131

The Chief Executive and Interim DCS provided an update to the Board on progress since the last Commission Board meeting on identifying options for a new office premises.

The Commission Board noted the update, and asked the team to focus on developing the Bunhill Row (Electoral Commission) option for formal consideration at the March meeting.

The Board discussed the benefits and risks of a move to a premises outside of London, which had been explored and articulated by the team, but, at this point, felt that it was unlikely to be productive to invest further resource into identifying a worked-up option given the impact on resilience, associated costs and difficulty in identifying appropriate space through the GPA. However, it was agreed that consideration should take place well in advance of the LGBCE's next move about if and how such relocation could work without comprising business continuity.

Agreed

The Commission Board noted the update and asked for a business case on the Bunhill Row option to be brought to the March meeting for consideration

12. Future business - LGBCE(23/24)

The Commission Board noted the future business document.