

LGBCE (24-25) 3rd meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 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 (for items 1, 3, 4 & 5)
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Alison Evison	Review & Programme Manager
Hayley Meachin	Communications & Engagement Manager
Jonathan Ashby	Review Officer and Mapping Lead
Tom Rutherford	Review Officer and Review Process Lead
Dean Faccini	Governance & Compliance Lead (for item 5)
Paul Nizinskyj	Review Officer (for item 8)
Brendan Connell-French	Review Officer (for items 9 & 10)
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (for item 2)
Rafa Chowdhury	Finance Lead (minutes)

Apologies for absence

An apology for the first part of the meeting was received from Wallace Sampson.
Amanda Nobbs gave apologies for the latter part of the meeting, from 11am.

Declarations of interest

The Chair, Colin Mellors declared an interest in Bradford Final Recommendations, and took no part in the discussions of that item.

Ailsa Irvine and Alison Evison declared an interest in Essex Final Recommendations, and took no part in the discussions of that item.

Wallace Sampson's interest in Bradford Final Recommendations and Middlesbrough Draft Recommendations was recorded, and he took no part in the discussions of those items.

Minutes of the LGBCE's meetings on 23 April 2024 and 25 April 2024

The minutes were agreed as a correct record, and were signed by the Chair, subject to the below amendment being made to the minutes of the 23 April meeting:
Item 4 – amend 'the EDI Champion' to 'the EDI Officer Champion'.

Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

Actions from previous Commission Board meetings

The following actions were reported on:

- Progress on resilience & retention – to be considered as part of relocation work: work on policies and protocols to support the office move is underway, and will be supported by our external HR consultant.
- Managing process on council size stage: the review process is being looked at from end-to-end review process, including how to embed on-going engagement with local authorities, with a view to ensuring a minimum level of engagement is achieved while also having the flexibility to deal with the specific circumstances of each individual authority.
- The Board requested that an action relating to the equalities statement issue discussed within the operational report is added to the action tracker.

The Commission Board noted the update on the outstanding actions.

1. Chair's report

The Chair informed the Board that there will be a memorial service for Paul Rowsell on 10 June, at which he will represent the LGBCE.

2. Bradford Further Draft and Final Recommendations - LGBCE(24/25)022

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

The review of Bradford Council had commenced on 20 June 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 23 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 20 June 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 90 and had subsequently, on 14 November 2023, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 191 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 and Further Draft Recommendations put to the Board for consideration.

The Final Recommendations and Further Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 30 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 agreed them in principle.

The Board also considered the Further Draft 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 on the Further Draft Recommendations, focusing on the areas of Baildon, Bingley and Shipley, and the six southernmost wards of the city (Bowling & Barkerend, Queensbury, Royds, Tong Street, Wibsey & Odsal and Wyke).

Agreed

The Board agreed to a period of further limited consultation focusing on the areas of Baildon, Bingley and Shipley, and the six southernmost wards of the city (Bowling & Barkerend, Queensbury, Royds, Tong Street, Wibsey & Odsal and Wyke). The Board agreed in principle the Final Recommendations for the remaining areas of Bradford.

The Chair, Colin Mellors, returned to the meeting at the conclusion of this item.

3. Operational report - LGBCE(24/25)014

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

The Commission Board agreed to consider the final recommendations for the South Derbyshire part of the Derbyshire review in July rather than June.

The Board discussed the order laying timetable and the risks relating to those due for implementation in 2025, and in particular the potential impact on those of a

December or January general election. The team were asked to explore how to ensure these risks, which are almost entirely outside of our control, are on record and understood by others such as DLUHC.

The behaviours charter was welcomed and endorsed by the Board, subject to a minor drafting correction. The Board supported its embedding in the appraisal process, and also noted that this framework should inform our engagement externally as well as how we work with each other.

4. Annual Report & Accounts update

The CEO and Interim DCS updated the Commission Board on the progress of the NAO's final audit, confirming that work was progressing as expected against the revised timetable (as amended to reflect the delay resulting from the NAO's staffing issue). The NAO still expects to complete its audit work by 24 May, with the final Annual Report and Accounts then coming to ARC and the Commission Board for approval on 17 June and 18 June respectively.

Amanda Nobbs left the meeting.

5. Risk - LGBCE(24/25)015

The Governance & Compliance Lead introduced the report and updated on the Risk Management Group's discussions in April and May.

6. Sandwell Council Size - LGBCE(24/25)016

It had been agreed to review Sandwell Council given the time that had elapsed since the last review. According to the latest available electoral figures, 13 per cent of wards had variances of greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 72 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 72 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 72 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 72 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

7. Melton Council Size - LGBCE(24/25)017

It had been agreed to review Melton Council given the time that had elapsed since the last review. According to the latest available electoral figures, one of the 16 wards (6%) had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 28 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 28 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support a council size of 28 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 28 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

8. Middlesbrough Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(24/25)018

The review of Middlesbrough Council had commenced on 12 December 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 25 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 12 December 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 46 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 6 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 support them.

Agreed

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

9. Swindon Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(24/25)019

Wallace Sampson joined the meeting.

The review of Swindon Council had commenced on 12 December 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 20 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 12 December 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 57 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 12 three-, 9 two-, and 3 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 Swindon Council as presented.

10. Vale of White Horse Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(24/25)020

The review of Vale of White Horse Council had commenced on 12 December 2023. 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 12 December 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 38. 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 39, which provides for a better pattern of boundaries 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 5 three-, 9 two-, and 6 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 Vale of White Horse Council as presented.

11. Essex Final Recommendations - LGBCE(24/25)021

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

The review of Essex County Council had commenced on 21 March 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 30 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 77 and had subsequently, on 14 November 2023 the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 78 and agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 107 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 78 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 Essex County Council as presented. The Board agreed to the laying of a draft Order before Parliament giving effect to its final recommendations for Essex County Council.

Alison Evison and Ailsa Irvine returned to the meeting at the conclusion of this item.

12. Sefton Final Recommendations - LGBCE(24/25)023

The review of Sefton Council had commenced on 18 July 2023. According to the latest available electoral figures, 5 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 July 2023, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 66 and had subsequently, on 12 December 2023, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 26 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 22 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 Sefton Council. The Board agreed to the laying of a draft Order before Parliament giving effect to its final recommendations for Sefton Council.

13. Future business

The Chief Executive confirmed that the meetings scheduled for July and September will be held in person. The Board will be asked for their availability for additional meeting slots in both of these months to ensure there is sufficient time available for all business to be considered. Availability will also be checked for September, around the scheduled Board meeting, for a potential Board/Leadership team 'away day'.