

## LGBCE (23-24) 5 Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 15 August 2023, at 10:00am. All Commissioners and officers attended the meeting via Teams.

### Commissioners Present

Professor Colin Mellors OBE (Chair)

Amanda Nobbs OBE

Andrew Scallan CBE

Susan Johnson OBE

Steve Robinson

Liz Treacy

Item 5, Gateshead

### LGBCE Officers Present:

Jolyon Jackson CBE

Kathryn Trower

Richard Buck

Richard Otterway

Hayley Meachin

Rafa Chowdhury

Chief Executive

Interim Director of Corporate Services

Review Manager

Review Manager

Communications and Engagement Manager

Finance Lead (minutes)

## Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Susan Johnson, Alison Evison (Review & Programme Manager) and Yemi Fagun (Review Officer).

## Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

## Minutes of LGBCE's meeting on 18 July 2023

Ingleby Barwick – Further to the mistake relating to the Stockton-on-Tees order, the Commission carried out a thorough investigation as to what went wrong. The results were shared with both Stockton-on-Tees Council and the affected town council, Ingleby Barwick, with whom the Commission has been in continuous contact to own and address this error. The Review Manager also explained the results of the investigation in person with the Town Council. This investigation revealed that the error was not a consequence of a process that includes several steps of checks and

audit, but rather a series of mistakes made by the individuals involved in each stage of that process. Nevertheless, the Commission has undertaken a thorough review of our audit procedures and are taking steps to restructure the process so that time and resources can be better focused on those 'high-threat' risks, and have addressed internally the level of performance required to continue to deliver reviews to our high standards. This should ensure that this error will not be repeated.

Subject to the above amendment, 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

- Clarity on corporate plan objectives – CEO to discuss timescale with Interim DCS in November.
- Progression on resilience and retention – will follow after the office accommodation requirements are scoped as we will then be able to consider all the strategic issues that feed into the organisation.
- Actions from the review undertaken by Sir Tony Redmond - Value for money to be discussed at October Policy session.
- Story Maps to be discussed later in the agenda.

## 1. Chair's Report

A new Chief Executive, Ailsa Irvine, has been appointed and is due to start on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024.

The Chair and Amanda Nobbs thanked the staff for their feedback during the sessions to discuss the above post.

## 2. Operational Report - LGBCE(23/24)047

The Chief Executive presented the Operational Report for August 2023, and the Commission noted its content.

- The Board noted the Related Alterations and consents pending agreement by the Board over the autumn.
- Review Programme Resilience – The Commission Board agreed to delay the first warding consultation for Colchester by four months until June 2024.
- The Board noted the Lead Commissioner allocations. It was noted that Steve Robinson will be the lead Commissioner for Dacorum and Hinckley & Bosworth, and Andrew Scallan for East Riding of Yorkshire.

- Data Breach – Following the data breach at the Electoral Commission, Wavex confirmed their monitoring systems had not raised anything to concern the LGBCE and no breaches had occurred.

### 3. Walsall Council Size - LGBCE(23/24)048

It had been agreed to review Walsall Council as part of the Periodic Electoral Review Programme. According to the latest available electoral figures, 30 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 60 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 60 members.

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

### 4. Solihull Council Size - LGBCE(23/24)049

It had been agreed to review Solihull Council as part of the Periodic Electoral Review Programme. According to the latest available electoral figures, 12 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, it 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. Gateshead Council Size - LGBCE(23/24)050

It had been agreed to review Gateshead Council as part of the Periodic Electoral Review Programme. According to the latest available electoral figures, 14 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 66 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 66 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, it was minded to support a council size of 66 members.

### **Agreed**

The Board agreed that a council size of 66 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

## **6. Worcester Final Recommendations - LGBCE(23/24)052**

The review of Worcester Council had commenced on 15 March 2022. According to the latest available electoral figures, 20 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 15 March 2022, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 35 and had subsequently, on 18 October 2022, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication of the draft recommendations, the Commission agreed to undertake a period of further consultation in several areas of the city.

Following publication, 27 submissions had been received commenting on the Further Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

Taking all of the submissions into account, for the reasons highlighted in the team's report in the south west of the city, the Further Draft Recommendations were confirmed. It was also considered that there was sufficient evidence to move away from the Further 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 3 three-member and 13 two-member wards in total.

The Board considered the Final Recommendations in detail, informed by the statutory criteria and taking into account the submissions received following publication of the Further Draft Recommendations.

It agreed the Final Recommendations as presented.

### **Agreed**

- 1) Final Recommendations for Worcester City Council as presented.
- 2) The Board agreed to the laying of a draft Order before Parliament giving effect to its final recommendations for Worcester City Council.

## **7. Review of Policies**

Risk - LGBCE(23/24)053

The Interim Director of Corporate Services presented the revised policy and highlighted the proposed changes.

Board Members made the following comments:

- The section on Risk Management roles does not state who approves the policy. The DCS confirmed that this will be updated in due course.
- Section 5.4 – Numbers in the Finance column need to be corrected.

### **Agreed**

The Commission Board approved the Risk Policy subject to the above amendments.

### Whistleblowing - LGBCE(23/24)054

The Interim Director of Corporate Services presented the revised policy and highlighted the proposed changes.

Board Members made the following comment:

- Protect Link on Page 5 needs to be replaced.

### **Agreed**

The Commission Board approved the Whistleblowing Policy subject to the above amendment.

### 8. Expenses Policy – Overnight Accommodation Rate - LGBCE(23/24)055

The Interim Director of Corporate Services introduced the report and highlighted the proposed changes.

### **Agreed**

- 1) The Commission Board approved the new overnight accommodation rates as outlined in the report.
- 2) Commissioner input to be included as part of the Fees and Expenses Policy review.

### 9. Relocation - LGBCE(23/24)056

The Chief Executive and Interim Director of Corporate Services introduced the report. The Commission's current lease at Windsor House expires in September 2024.

The Board welcomed the report as part of the next steps in taking forward this issue and raised a number of suggestions:

- It would be helpful for a further report to be presented to the Commission Board setting out clear milestones and timescales.
- It would be important to define the criteria that would enable us to judge if a location/building was meeting the objectives set out in 2.1. Developing a matrix would be a good starting point to address the bullet points listed in 2.1.
- Implications for contract and travel expenses would need to be considered.
- Organisational cohesion and sustainability should be added as two additional and separate bullet points in section 2.1.
- We need to consider requirements in terms of maintaining our independence.

The Interim Director of Corporate Services was thanked for the paper.

## 10. Risk Register - LGBCE(23/24)057

The Interim Director of Corporate Services introduced the report. Details regarding the Risk Management Group's August meeting were provided.

- Operational resilience - the score of Operational Resilience was reduced to Possible / Major / 6 due to the range of mitigations in place and because the Commission has now successfully navigated through a period of staff turnover. The change in risk score now removes this from the Commission's top three risks. A new risk will take its place once the Risk Management Group has agreed to this at the September Leadership Team meeting.
- Information Security / Management - No change was made to its score of Possible / Catastrophic / 8 and trend status of 'Stable'. The group agreed that this risk should replace Risk 2B 'Failure to have a resilient workforce' as a top 3 risk.

## 11. Future Business

The October Board meeting will be in person followed by the policy session, where Value for Money and Five-Year forecast will be discussed.

## 12. Any Other Business

Following the discussion at the June policy session, the review evaluation form template has been redrafted to include more about the Preliminary period. These would be circulated to Lead Commissioners over the next few weeks.

## 13. Read out from Strategy Day - LGBCE(23/24)058

The Chief Executive introduced the report on the reflections from the Board and Leadership Team Away Day held in June 2023.

- EDI Session – EDI Group to discuss timelines for reviewing materials and the wording of amendments in the report. The next step relates to how we gather stakeholder lists which will return to the Commission Board in September
- Roles and responsibilities – Lead Commissioners have early input on the framing of review recommendations. Officers come up with recommendations and Commission members then make the decisions.

### **Agreed**

The Commission Board noted the report.

## 14. Story Maps

Some Commissioners would prefer a return to the old approach of detailed maps for Board meetings, but the Review Manager explained that this would necessitate ROs creating two identical sets of Story Maps - one with unaudited/unedited text and one for publication.

### **Agreed**

Small change to the full reports - The areas in the long report that are referenced in the cover paper should be highlighted in yellow and with red text.

### **Close of Business**