

LGBCE (25-26) 7th meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2025 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
Rachel Barker	Director of Reviews, Strategy & Engagement
Bipon Bhakri	Director of Corporate Services
Alison Evison	Review & Programme Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Hayley Meachin	Communications & Engagement Manager
Brendan Connell-French	Senior Review Officer
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (item 3)
Tom Rutherford	Review Officer (item 4)
Angela Hendry	HR Lead (minutes)

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Jonathan Ashby.

Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of the LGBCE's meeting on 19 August 2025

The minutes were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

Actions from previous Commission Board meetings

The following action was reported on:

- MHCLG and the use of terminology in relation to wards/divisions – we have now had clarification from MHCLG officials on the legislative position in relation to the use of the terms 'wards' or 'divisions'. A letter is being drafted for the Chair to send to the Minister to put our views on record and highlight our support for legislative change.

1. Chair's report

The Chair reported on the successful strategic awaydays held the previous week in Leeds. It was noted that a document summarising the key themes of the discussions was being prepared and will be circulated to the Leadership Team and the Board.

The Chair noted the recent change in the Minister with responsibility for local government, and undertook to write to the newly appointed Minister, welcoming them to their role and offering the opportunity to meet.

The Board noted the current series of LGR webinars for local authorities that have been facilitated by MHCLG. Feedback is being gathered from those who attended the webinars and this will be shared in due course. It was noted that the Review Manager, Richard Buck, had also presented a similar webinar to the Association of Electoral Administrators.

2. Operational report - LGBCE(25/26) 038

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

- The Board noted the new risk dashboard and update which will now be included monthly, in line with the updated risk policy agreed last month.
- In response to a question on the findings of the website survey, it was noted that the key themes of feedback related to: navigation of the site, understanding the language used to describe the review process, and understanding what feedback was being sought by the consultation process and how it would be used.
- The Board noted that lead officers have now been assigned to LGR areas and that this is supporting the effective sharing of information with Lead Commissioners about what is happening in an area.

3. Wirral Final Recommendations – LGBCE(25/26)039

The review of Wirral Council had commenced on 20 August 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 4 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 20 August 2024, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 66 and had subsequently, on 18 March 2025, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 44 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 team proposed that the Commission move away from its original opinion on council size and instead agree a council size of 65 as part of its Final Recommendations, in order to facilitate a better warding pattern in the West Kirby area.

The Final Recommendations proposed a pattern of 21 three- and 1 two-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 Wirral Council as presented.

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

4. Westmorland & Furness Final Recommendations – LGBCE(25/26)040

The review of Westmorland & Furness Council had commenced on 20 August 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 50 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 20 August 2024, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 65 and had subsequently, on 18 February 2025, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 52 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 9 three-, 12 two- and 14 single-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 Westmorland & Furness Council as presented.

The Board agreed to the laying of a draft Order before Parliament giving effect to its final recommendations for Westmorland & Furness Council.

5. ARC membership – LGBCE(25/26)041

The Director of Corporate Services presented the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) membership report, and the Board noted its content.

Agreed

The Board agreed to the appointment of Wallace Sampson as a member of ARC for an initial term of one year, commencing on 17 September 2025.

AOB

There was no other business.