

LGBCE (25-26) 9th meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2025 at 10:00am
All Commissioners and officers attended the meeting via Teams

Commissioners present:

Professor Colin Mellors OBE (Chair)
Amanda Nobbs OBE
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
Jonathan Ashby	Senior Review Officer
Yemi Fagun	Review Officer (item 3)
Angela Hendry	HR Lead (minutes)

Apologies for absence

There were apologies for absence from Janet Waggott.

Declarations of interest

Colin Mellors declared an interest in relation to item 5, York councillor numbers, and took no part in the discussion on that item.

Minutes of the LGBCE's meeting on 21 October 2025

The minutes were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair, subject to the addition of specific reference under the operational report item to the risks relating to potential peaks in work for Ordnance Survey as a result of the activity of other Boundary Commissions.

Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

Actions from previous Commission Board meetings

The following actions were reported on:

- Ordnance Survey (OS) – an overview of the current arrangements has been included in the operational report this month. A meeting has also been secured for early December, where we will seek assurances that they will be able to support our review programme in the coming years.
- Data (Use and Access) Act training – awaiting proposal from our internal auditors (MIAA).
- Councillor numbers data – action has been completed.
- 2026-27 programme – contact has been made with Manchester and Wiltshire to set up discussions, and a further update will be provided to the Board next month.

1. Chair's report

The Chair provided an update on progress with the recruitment of new Commissioners, and confirmed that a new Commissioner, Janet Waggott, has been appointed with immediate effect. A second appointment, due to start in April, was understood to be imminent.

The Board noted that Parliament has now approved a motion regarding the appointment of Beverley Smith as the Commission's new Chair from January 2026.

The Chair also reported on the positive meeting with the Speaker's Committee on 11 November.

2. Operational report - LGBCE(25/26)042

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

- Somerset electoral review – The Council had challenged the Commission's interpretation that its stated preference for single-member divisions constituted a formal request that this be a single member division review. Given that respondents may have been inadvertently discouraged from proposing multi-member wards believing that we would not give such proposals due consideration, the team proposed that the consultation on draft recommendations be reopened to give the opportunity for further views to be submitted before the recommendations for Somerset are finalised.

Since the circulation of the operational report, a letter had been received from an officer at the Council requesting that, notwithstanding the discrepancy, the publication of the final recommendations proceed without the reopening of the consultation.

The Board discussed in detail how to proceed, and agreed that the consultation on draft recommendations for Somerset should be reopened in order to give the opportunity for people to provide further views following clarification that this is not a single-member review. The Board asked the team to develop an appropriate timetable for the reopened consultation, giving sufficient time for conversations with the Council prior to its commencement and enabling the Board to consider the final recommendations at its February 2026 meeting.

The Board noted that the team are looking at the lessons learned from this issue and have already taken steps to revise the process we use to confirm with local authorities whether or not a review is to be a single-member review to mitigate against similar issues occurring in the future.

- Cheshire East – The Board noted that a meeting had taken place between the Chair, LGBCE officers and Tim Roca MP (Macclesfield) on 30 October 2025. Mr Roca expressed concerns that the Commission had made changes to the recommendations for Macclesfield without holding a further round of consultation. While the Commission had acted in accordance with procedure and legislative requirements, the meeting provided helpful feedback which the review team will use to support the continuous improvement of the review process, including specific work on our approach to further draft recommendations. It was noted that the draft order for Cheshire East had been laid in Parliament on 13 November 2025.
- Stakeholder research project – The Board noted that the contract for the research is on track to be awarded before the end of the year, with the focus groups work to take place in January 2026. The outcomes of this work will inform a number of other projects in 2026-27, including the development of our new website.
- Complaint - The Board noted the stage one complaint received from Westmorland and Furness. A response was being prepared and would be sent by the deadline of 24 November 2025.
- Risk – A point was raised about the risk of people using AI to develop submissions to pursue politically driven outcomes. This will be discussed further in the first instance by the Audit and Risk Committee at its next meeting, where it is due to consider work on the Commission's digital strategy.

3. Cumberland Further Draft & Final Recommendations - LGBCE(25/26)048

The review of Cumberland Council had commenced on 19 November 2024.

At its meeting on 19 November 2024, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 55 and had subsequently, on 29 May 2025, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 78 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 55 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 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, and agreed to a period of further limited consultation on the Further Draft Recommendations, focusing on Carlisle, Workington and central Cumberland.

Agreed

The Board agreed a period of further limited consultation on the Further Draft Recommendations, focusing on Carlisle, Workington and central Cumberland. The Board agreed in principle the Final Recommendations for the remaining areas of Cumberland.

4. Bristol Councillor Numbers - LGBCE(25/26)049

It had been agreed to review Bristol City Council given the time that had elapsed since the last review. According to the latest available electoral figures, 21 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 70 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 number of councillors increase by 6, from 70 to 76 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support the proposal that the Council be made up of 76 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that 76 councillors should be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

5. York Councillor Numbers – LGBCE(25/26)050

The Chair, Colin Mellors, left the meeting and took no part in the discussion on this item.

The item was chaired by the Deputy Chair, Andrew Scallan.

It had been agreed to review City of York Council given the time that had elapsed since the last review. According to the latest available electoral figures, 5 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 47 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 number of councillors remain at 47 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support the proposal that the Council be made up of 47 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that 47 councillors should be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

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

6. Darlington Councillor Numbers – LGBCE(25/26)051

It had been agreed to review Darlington Council given the time that had elapsed since the last review. 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 50 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 number of councillors decrease by 9, from 50 to 41 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support the proposal that the Council be made up of 41 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that 41 councillors should be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

7. North Somerset Councillor Numbers – LGBCE(25/26)052

It had been agreed to review North Somerset Council given the time that had elapsed since the last review. According to the latest available electoral figures, 11 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 50 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 number of councillors remain at 50 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support the proposal that the Council be made up of 50 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that 50 councillors should be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

8. Herefordshire Councillor Numbers – LGBCE(25/26)053

It had been agreed to review Herefordshire Council given the time that had elapsed since the last review. According to the latest available electoral figures, 17 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 53 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 number of councillors remain at 53 members.

The Board considered all the available evidence and, on the basis of this evidence, was minded to support the proposal that the Council be made up of 53 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that 53 councillors should be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

9. 2026/27 business planning update – LGBCE(25/26)054

The Chief Executive and the Directors presented the business planning update, and the Board noted its content.

- The Board proposed that the priority areas identified under each of the strategic objectives inform our quarterly performance reporting, enabling the Board to maintain effective oversight of our progress in each of these areas.
- In response to a question about how we inspire public confidence in our work as a public body, it was noted that the findings of the stakeholder research project should help to inform future work in this area.
- In relation to office accommodation, the Board agreed to proceed on the assumption that we will seek a further one-year Licence to Occupy from the Electoral Commission for 2026–27. This reflects that the space is working well for us currently, but also recognises that we are continuing to refine how we work and will benefit from giving further consideration to our longer-term accommodation strategy in order to inform our approach for future years.

The Board were supportive of the progress made, and were content that the approach set out in the paper provided an appropriate basis for the further development of the business plan and main supply estimate, which will be brought to the Board for formal approval in January 2026.

10. Workplan

The Board noted the workplan for the coming months, with the next in-person Board meeting scheduled for February 2026.

11. AOB

In response to a question on the new SharePoint project and access permissions, it was noted that feedback from staff and Commissioners has been shared with Silicon Reef and work is in progress to address any outstanding issues.

It was noted that Knowsley Council had asked for in-person community briefings which took place last week. The team will consider the lessons learned from those briefings and how these can inform our future approach.