

LGBCE (25-26) 10th meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2025 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
Liz Treacy
Janet Waggott

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
Jonathan Ashby	Senior Review Officer
Nicole Holt	Review Officer (item 7)
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (item 7)
Tom Rutherford	Review Officer (item 7)
Angela Hendry	HR Lead (minutes)

Apologies for absence

There were apologies for absence from Wallace Sampson and Brendan Connell-French.

Welcome

The Chair welcomed the new Commissioner, Janet Waggott, to her first meeting of the Board.

Declarations of interest

Liz Treacy declared an interest in item 2, Operational report, specifically Manchester electoral review and took no part in the discussion on that item.

Hayley Meachin declared an interest in item 3, Warrington councillor numbers, and took no part in the discussion on that item.

Colin Mellors and Janet Waggott declared an interest in item 4, North Yorkshire Final Recommendations, and took no part in the discussion on this item.

Rachel Barker declared an interest in relation to Hampshire and the Isle of Wight under item 7, and took no part in the discussion relating to that area.

Andrew Scallan and Richard Buck declared an interest in relation to Sussex under item 7, and took no part in the discussion relating to that area.

Ailsa Irvine and Alison Evison declared an interest in relation to Essex under item 7, and took no part in the discussion relating to that area.

Minutes of the LGBCE's meeting on 18 November 2025

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

Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

Actions from previous Commission Board meetings

The following actions were reported on:

- Ordnance Survey (OS) – a meeting has taken place with OS to discuss our working arrangements and we received assurances that they will be able to support our review programme over the coming years. We are reviewing our contract with OS before it expires in March 2026, which provides an opportunity for what was discussed to be put on a formal footing.
- Data (Use and Access) Act – a provisional slot has been identified for January 2026 for training to be provided by MIAA, our internal auditor.
- Review programme – updates on the two actions relating to the 2026/27 programme have been included in the operational report

1. Chair's report

The Chair reported that we a new Commissioner, Dame Gillian Guy, has been appointed to join the Commission from April 2026.

The Chair noted that this is his last Board meeting before his term ends, and gave thanks to Commissioners and staff, past and present, for their support during his time with the Commission.

2. Operational report – LGBCE(25/26)055

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

- Essex amendment order – The Board agreed to the laying of an amendment order in Parliament. The Board noted the changes to our procedures that have taken place since the errors occurred which will help to mitigate against similar issues arising in the future. The Director of Reviews, Strategy and Engagement updated on work more generally to strengthen the mitigations to our operational risks to address the potential for errors, and also noted that the mapping the review project will provide further opportunities for scrutiny of our practices and the identification of improvements that can be made to enhance these further.
- 2026/27 programme – The Board agreed to add Manchester to the 2026/27 programme. The Review and Programme Manager updated on recent discussions with Wiltshire and the development that is underway in the Chippenham ward. The Board agreed not to include Wiltshire in the 2026/27 programme. The approach to the review in the Isles of Scilly will be brought back to the Board for endorsement in the New Year, and will address how the councillor numbers stage can be approached.
- Dashboard project – It was noted that Commissioners will have the opportunity to provide comments after the team has completed the current round of amendments, and that further refinements would still be able to be made to the product at that stage.
- Structures of local governance – It was noted that the amendments to the English Devolution & Community Empowerment Bill on the use of the committee system could have an impact on the electoral reviews in Sheffield and Bristol, although it was difficult at this stage to confirm what that might be.
- Format of the report – The Board asked that where there are items for action or decision, these should be drawn out more explicitly in the presentation of the report.
- Communications – It was noted that the stakeholder research focus groups will be held both remotely and in-person, and any Commissioner interested in observing should contact the Director of Reviews, Strategy and Engagement. There was a broader discussion about how we invite feedback on our recommendations and how we encourage people to indicate support for the proposals as well as feedback on what they don't like, which will be considered further as part of the planned portfolio of communications projects.

- Westmorland and Furness – The Board noted that the response to the complaint has now been sent out. The intention is to lay the Order in Parliament on 13 January 2026, for implementation in 2027.
- IT – the Board noted some issues with accessing links in Board papers. The Director of Corporate Services updated on the continuing work on our SharePoint system, which will include completing trouble-shooting from the recent transition to the new platform, and also highlighted the digital strategy work, which will include a digital skills assessment and the identification of training needs.

3. Warrington councillor numbers – LGBCE(25/26)056

Hayley Meachin left the meeting and took no part in the discussion on this item.

It had been agreed to review Warrington Council given the time that had elapsed since their last review. According to the latest available electoral figures, 18 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 58 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 58 to 60 members.

Agreed

The Board agreed that a council size of 60 be used as the basis for the preparation of the Draft Recommendations.

Hayley Meachin returned to meeting at the conclusion of this item.

4. North Yorkshire Final Recommendations – LGBCE(25/26)057

Colin Mellors and Janet Waggott left the meeting and took no part in the discussion on this item. Andrew Scallan chaired the item.

The review of North Yorkshire Council had commenced on 18 September 2024.

At its meeting on 18 September 2024, the Board had been minded to agree a council size of 89 and had subsequently, on 18 March 2025, agreed Draft Recommendations.

Following publication, 124 submissions had been received commenting on the Draft Recommendations which had been considered carefully in the context of the statutory criteria.

At its meeting on 19 August 2025, the Board agreed to conduct a period of further consultation focusing on the central and western areas of North Yorkshire. The Board agreed, in principle, to the Final Recommendations for the remaining areas of the authority.

Following publication of the Further Draft Recommendations, 63 submissions had been received 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 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 2 two- and 85 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 Further Draft Recommendations.

The Board was minded to approve the Final Recommendations, subject to receiving confirmation that, with regard to our compliance with the duty under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (as amended by Section 245 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023), the recommendations would have no material effect on representation for communities within the protected landscapes.

Agreed

The Board agreed the Final Recommendations for North Yorkshire as presented, subject to confirmation that, with regard to our compliance with the duty under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (as amended by Section 245 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023), the recommendations would have no material effect on representation for communities within the protected landscapes.

Further to this, the Board agreed to the laying of a draft Order before Parliament giving effect to its final recommendations for North Yorkshire Council.

Colin Mellors and Janet Waggott returned to the meeting at the conclusion of the item.

5. ARC minutes July 2025 – LGBCE(25/26)058

The Commission Board noted the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee's meeting on 28 July 2025.

6. ARC Chair's report from November meeting

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee provided an overview of the key items discussed at the in-person meeting of the Committee that took place on 24 November 2025.

- ARC members had a private meeting with the NAO and internal auditors prior to the ARC meeting, and the Chair of ARC has fed back to the Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services on those discussions. The main issue raised was in relation to staff resilience and what processes we have in place to cover when staff are absent.
- The Committee considered the health and safety update and discussed possible corporate manslaughter training. Other agenda items covered an IT update, progress with preparing for the Annual Report & Accounts, and internal audit work, including the proposal for the sustainability plan audit.
- The Committee also reviewed a number of policies, including FOI, correspondence handling and external complaints, and made several recommendations for refinement, including to streamline the complaints policy through a move to a two-stage process for complaints.
- There was a deep dive on the risks relating to strategic objective one, and also a discussion on work relating to the digital strategy.

7. LGR consultation responses – LGBCE(25/26)059

The Board discussed the Commission's approach to responding to the Government's consultation on the proposals for local government reorganisation in the devolved priority programme areas that do not use existing districts as building blocks.

The Board considered and agreed the covering letter which would be sent with responses to the consultations on Norfolk, Suffolk, Sussex, and Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

The Board then discussed the detail of the specific response to each of the consultations in turn.

It was agreed that some further work should be undertaken to ensure consistency across the different responses, and to complete further checks to provide additional assurances as to their accuracy. The full set of updated responses will be shared with the Board by e-mail for final approval, ahead of being sent in the name of the Chief Executive before the 11 January 2026 deadline.

The Board agreed the letter to be sent in response to the Essex consultation.

8. Commission Board workplan

The Board noted the forward workplan. The Chief Executive highlighted that the February Board meeting will be in-person, with the logistics to be confirmed in the New Year.

9. AOB

The Deputy Chair acknowledged the long service of the Chair, Colin Mellors, and thanked him for his contributions during his time at the Commission, wishing him well for the future.