The Local Government Boundary Commission for England

LGBCE (26-27) 5th meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 August 2026 at 9.30am

All Commissioners and officers attended the meeting via Teams

Commissioners present:
Bev Smith (Chair)
Dame Gillian Guy
Wallace Sampson OBE
Andrew Scallan CBE

LGBCE officers present:

Ailsa Irvine	Chief Executive
Rachel Barker	Director of Reviews, Strategy and Engagement
Bipon Bhakri	Director of Corporate Services
Alison Evison	Review and Programme Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Jonathan Ashby	Senior Review Officer (Mapping)
Brendan Connell-French	Senior Review Officer (Review Process)
Angela Hendry	HR Lead (minutes)

The Chair welcomed Aidan Rave and Sophia Adesoye from the Good Governance Institute to the meeting. Their attendance is to observe the meeting as part of their work with the Commission on a strategic governance stocktake, which will build towards the Board effectiveness session in October and inform the forthcoming corporate governance framework review.

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Janet Waggott, Liz Treacy and Hayley Meachin.

Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of the LGBCE's meeting on 21 July 2026

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

Matters arising

Wallace Sampson updated that following the discussion at the previous meeting on the use of AI in the Commission's work, the Digital Committee will consider this as part of the agenda for its first meeting on 19 August. There will be an update at the September Board on progress, with a fuller discussion scheduled for a future point.

Actions from previous Commission Board meetings

There were three actions from the previous meeting:

- First principles session for the Board on the use of AI – consideration of how to address this will be considered at the August Digital Committee meeting.
- The future approach to the risk and resilience budget will be considered as part of the November Board discussion on 2027-28 business planning.
- The date for the spring in-person meeting has now been confirmed as 16 March 2027. This action is now complete.

1. Chair's report

The Chair reflected on the recent Cabinet statement on Rewiring the State, noting its content in relation to devolution, arm's length bodies and public participation and how that relates to the Commission's work, such as that on updating guidance on councillor numbers.

The Chair also noted the recent change in Ministers and confirmed that engagement is underway with officials to set-up an introductory meeting. Similarly, expected changes to the membership of the Speaker's Committee were highlighted. Meetings are also scheduled with the new Chair of the LGA and the Chair of NALC, which the Chair will update on in due course.

2. Operational report – LGBCE(26/27)020

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

The Director of Reviews, Strategy and Engagement gave an update on progress with the website procurement process. Ten submissions were received by the deadline, and all indicated that the proposed timescales and budget envelope were realistic and achievable. It was noted that the project remains on track for a

recommendation to be made to the Board on a preferred supplier for approval at the specially-convened 8 September 2026 meeting. The Digital Committee and ARC will continue to receive regular reports on the website project to support governance and assurance.

3. Isles of Scilly councillor numbers and Draft Recommendations – LGBCE(26/27)025

It had been agreed to review Isles of Scilly given the time that elapsed since the last review. According to the latest available electoral figures, two wards had variances over 30 per cent.

The current size of the Council is 16 members.

Following receipt of information about future governance and representational arrangements, it was recommended by LGBCE officers that there was sufficient evidence to support the number of councillors remaining at 16 members.

In preparing the draft scheme, the team had taken into consideration the submission it had received from the Council and the statutory criteria. The Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 1 twelve, and 4 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 submission received, and was minded to agree them.

Agreed

The Board agreed the Draft Recommendations as presented, and supported their preparation based on a council size of 16 members.

4. Dorset Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(26/27)026

The review of Dorset Council had commenced on 17 March 2026. According to the latest available electoral figures, 31 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 17 March 2026, the Board had been minded to agree that the authority have 82 councillors. However, after further consideration and on the basis of the available evidence, the team proposed that the Commission move away from its original opinion and instead agree that the council have 84 members, which supports a warding pattern that better reflects the statutory criteria.

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-, 14 two-, and 38 single-member wards in total.

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 agree them.

Agreed

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

5. Annual review evaluation – LGBCE(26/27)027

The Senior Review Officer (Review Process) presented the annual review evaluation report, and the Board noted its content.

The Board noted the key themes identified from the year's review activity, and the work that was underway to respond to the feedback that has been received. The learning from recent reviews of newly unitarised authorities was considered, and the Chief Executive confirmed how this will be used to inform work on review programming and engagement with new authorities arising from the current LGR process.

There was support for a more continuous evaluation approach, enabling lessons to be identified and addressed more quickly than is possible with an annual review process.

It was agreed that quarterly performance reporting provides an appropriate mechanism for highlighting emerging key themes and monitoring the impact of actions in addressing the feedback that has been received, with direct links to the KPIs.

6. ARC minutes – LGBCE(26/27)028

The Board noted the ARC minutes from the meetings which had taken place in February and May 2026.

7. ARC Chair's report (August meeting)

The Director of Corporate Services updated the Board on the 3 August 2026 ARC meeting:

- ARC reviewed updates on IT and cyber security and health and safety, and requested regular updates and continued engagement on work relating to tendering for an IT services provider.

- A thematic deep dive on strategic objective 3 provided assurance on digital modernisation, organisational resilience, people strategy, value for money and financial governance. ARC was also assured with the explanations and mitigations in place for operational risks.
- The revised business continuity plan was approved, subject to minor amendments relating to the Chair's role in significant external communications during a crisis.
- ARC endorsed the staff expenses policy and noted the Commissioners' fees and expenses policy.
- Planned internal audit work remains on schedule, audit recommendations continue to be monitored, and planning is underway for the next external audit cycle with the NAO.

8. Fes and expenses policies – LGBCE(26/27)029

The Director of Corporate Services presented the updated fees and expenses policies. The previous combined policy has been separated into two documents: one for staff expenses and one for Commissioners' fees and expenses. This revised approach supports accessibility and navigability and provides clearer governance, ownership and approval arrangements.

ARC had considered both policies and were content that the revised arrangements provided appropriate governance, controls and clarity.

It was noted that implementation would take effect immediately following approval.

Agreed

The Board approved the staff expenses policy and noted the Commissioners' fees and expenses policy.

9. Commission Board workplan

The Board noted the forward work plan, including confirmation that the next in-person Board meeting will take place in March 2027.

It was noted that the September Board meeting will include an equality, diversity and inclusion training and awareness session, supporting later discussions on the Board's strategic equality objectives.