

LGBCE (26-27) 1<sup>st</sup> meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2026 at 9:30am  
All Commissioners and officers attended the meeting via Teams

Commissioners present:

Bev Smith (Chair)  
Dame Gillian Guy  
Amanda Nobbs OBE  
Wallace Sampson  
Andrew Scallan CBE  
Liz Treacy  
Janet Waggott

LGBCE officers present

Ailsa Irvine	Chief Executive
Rachel Barker	Director of Reviews, Strategy and Engagement
Alison Evison	Review and Programme Manager
Richard Buck	Review Manager
Brendan Connell-French	Senior Review Officer
Jonathan Ashby	Senior Review Officer
Mark Cooper	Review Officer (item 5)
Yemi Fagun	Review Officer (item 7)
Paul Kingsley	Review Officer (item 6)
Tom Rutherford	Review Officer (item 3)
Rafa Chowdhury	Finance Lead (minutes)

## Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Bapon Bhakri and Hayley Meachin.

## Welcome

The Chair welcomed the new Commissioner, Dame Gillian Guy, to her first meeting of the Board.

## Declarations of interest

Janet Waggott declared an interest in item 3, City of York draft recommendations, and took no part in the discussion of that item.

## Minutes of the LGBCE's meeting on 17 March 2026

Minutes to be amended to reflect that all attendees joined the meeting via Microsoft Teams. Subject to the amendment, 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

There were no outstanding actions.

### 1. Chair's report

The Chair reported on the following:

- Completion of the final LGR moderation group meetings and the provision of our informal observations on councillor numbers to MHCLG.
- Ongoing engagement with stakeholders, including introductory meetings with the Local Councils Network and their reflections on the LGR process and its impact on capacity and workload.

## 2. Operational report - LGBCE(26/27)001

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

The recent FOI request was discussed, and it was agreed that officers would provide Board members with visibility of responses where requests may be of a higher risk.

## 3. City of York Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(26/27)002

*Janet Waggott left the meeting and took no part in the discussion on this item.*

The review of City of York Council had commenced on 18 November 2025. According to the latest available electoral figures, 5 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 November 2025, the Board had been minded to agree that the authority have 47 councillors. However, as a result of further consideration and on the basis of the evidence received, the team proposed that the Commission move away from its original opinion and instead agree that the council have 48 members, which provides for a ward pattern that better reflects the statutory criteria.

In preparing the draft scheme, the team had taken into consideration both the submissions received and the statutory criteria. The Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 10 three-, 6 two-, and 6 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 submissions received, and was minded to agree them.

### **Agreed**

The Board agreed the Draft Recommendations for City of York Council as presented.

*Janet Waggott returned to the meeting at the conclusion of this item.*

## 4. Darlington Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(26/27)003

The review of Darlington Council had commenced on 18 November 2025. According to the latest available electoral figures, 30 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 November 2025, the Board had been minded to agree that the authority have 41 councillors and the Draft Recommendations being considered had been prepared on the basis of that number of councillors.

In preparing the draft scheme, the team had taken into consideration both the submissions received and the statutory criteria. The Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 6 three-, 11 two-, and 1 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 submissions received, and was minded to agree them.

### **Agreed**

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

## **5. Herefordshire Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(26/27)004**

The review of Herefordshire Council had commenced on 18 November 2025. According to the latest available electoral figures, 17 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 November 2025, the Board had been minded to agree that the authority have 53 councillors and the Draft Recommendations being considered had been prepared on the basis of that number of councillors.

In preparing the draft scheme, the team had taken into consideration both the submissions received and the statutory criteria. The Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 53 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 submissions received, and was minded to agree them.

### **Agreed**

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

## **6. North Somerset Draft Recommendations - LGBCE(26/27)005**

The review of North Somerset council had commenced on 18 November 2025. According to the latest available electoral figures, 11 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 November 2025, the Board had been minded to agree that the authority have 50 councillors. However, as a result of further consideration and on the basis of the evidence received, the team proposed that the Commission move away from its original opinion and instead agree that the council have 51 members, which provides for a ward pattern that better reflects the statutory criteria.

In preparing the draft scheme, the team had taken into consideration both the submissions received and the statutory criteria. The Draft Recommendations proposed a pattern of 1 three-, 15 two-, and 18 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 submissions received, and was minded to agree them.

## **Agreed**

The Board agreed the Draft Recommendations for North Somerset Council as presented.

## **7. Cumberland Final Recommendations - LGBCE(26/27)006**

The review of Cumberland Council had commenced on 19 November 2024. According to the latest available electoral figures, 22 per cent of wards had variances greater than 10 per cent.

At its meeting on 18 November 2024, the Board had been minded to agree that the authority have 55 councillors and had subsequently, on 20 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.

At its meeting on 18 November 2025, the Board agreed to conduct a period of further consultation focusing on Carlisle, Workington and central Cumberland. The Board agreed, in principle, to the Final Recommendations for the remaining areas of the authority.

Following publication of the Further Draft Recommendations, 31 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 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 Further Draft Recommendations, and was minded to agree them.

## **Agreed**

The Board agreed the Final Recommendations for Cumberland Council as presented.

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

## 8. Bromsgrove Related Alteration - LGBCE(26/27)007

The Board considered the request received from Bromsgrove District Council for related alterations to district ward boundaries further to a Community Governance Review (CGR) which was completed in February 2016.

Given the time that had elapsed since the CGR was undertaken, and taking account the fact that the consultation had not in any case addressed changes to ward boundaries, the Board was not persuaded to agree to the related alteration request.

### **Agreed**

The Board did not agree to the request from Bromsgrove Council for related alterations to ward boundaries.

## 9. Q4 performance report - LGBCE(26/27)008

The Chief Executive presented the Q4 performance report and the Board noted its content.

- The Board noted the provisional year-end financial position and discussed the projected 12% underspend against the revised resource budget, excluding the risk and resilience provision. The drivers for the underspend were discussed, including LGR impacts on our review programme and associated activity, the rent-free period for our office accommodation, procurement efficiencies and deferred digital work. The implications for future years' budgeting were considered, and officers provided assurances about the approach to monitoring spend throughout the year to support earlier identification and addressing of any emerging underspend.
- There was a suggestion that the Annual Report and Accounts could look to present LGR-related performance information in a graphical way, to help illustrate clearly the scale of the Commission's work in this area.
- The Board considered performance against the key performance indicators, including those informed by our stakeholder survey. It was noted that there will be a further discussion on KPIs and potential targets at the June Board meeting.

## 10. Communications strategy - LGBCE(26/27)009

The Director of Reviews, Strategy and Engagement (DRSE) presented the communications strategy, which provides the framework for how communications activity will be delivered in order to achieve the objectives outlined in the Commission's corporate plan.

The DRSE outlined the strategy's focus on clarity, fairness and trust, the use of research and stakeholder feedback, and the commitment to consistent messaging and campaign-based approaches.

Board members discussed the contents of the strategy and were content to agree the strategy subject to the following points:

- That a document similar in format to appendix B of the digital strategy paper be developed outlining the priority areas of activity in 2026/27 and shared with the Board.
- That the role of Commissioners as ambassadors for the Commission is referenced within the strategy
- That there is a continued focus on the alignment between the communications and digital strategies and their subsequent delivery
- That further work is conducted on the corporate and review-related messaging, in line with the principles within the Strategy, for consideration by the Board later in the year.

### **Agreed**

The Commission Board approved the communications strategy, subject to the above amendments.

## 11. Digital strategy - LGBCE(26/27)010

The Chief Executive presented the digital strategy, which sets out the framework for how the Commission will use digital technology and capability to help achieve the objectives outlined in the Commission's corporate plan.

Board members discussed the strategy and made the following comments:

- The strategic themes and design principles were supported, as was the recognition of the importance of people, skills and ways of working
- The importance of strong oversight of activity and resources was noted, with the role of the Digital Committee in supporting this activity being welcomed
- Progress will be reported through existing mechanisms such as the operational report and quarterly performance reports

- The wording of the ‘integration before innovation’ principle should be reviewed, to move away from the use of the word ‘innovation’ in this context
- It was suggested that the strategy explicitly reference a preference for off-the-shelf solutions over bespoke solutions

The Board noted the priority areas for delivery in 2026-27.

### **Agreed**

The Commission Board approved the digital strategy, subject to the above amendments.

## **12. Commission Board workplan**

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 19 May 2026 to consider and approve the Annual Report and Accounts. If this timetable is not achieved, the Annual Report and Accounts will instead be considered at the scheduled June meeting of the Board.