

**REPORT FROM: CHIEF EXECUTIVE (INTERIM)**

**TO: EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING**

**DATE: 17 MARCH 2025**

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## **DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION**

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To update the Council on the Government's proposals regarding devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) Note the current position and timetable.
- (2) Endorse the draft joint Lancashire Leaders letter which is being proposed as the Interim Plan submission, to Government, by 21<sup>st</sup> March 2025.
- (3) Consider whether the Council has an initial preference for any of the option(s) at point 11 in the report.

### **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) The Government has set out its expectations and timetable for Local Government Reorganisation across England. Pendle Borough Council needs to take part in work across Lancashire to ensure the future needs of the area are considered.

## **BACKGROUND**

1. In December 2024, the Government published its English Devolution White Paper.
2. The White Paper sets out the Government's ambition to create Strategic Authorities across all regions of England. These will be either:

- Foundation Strategic Authorities: these include non-mayoral combined authorities and combined county authorities automatically, and any local authority designated as a Strategic Authority without a Mayor.
  - Mayoral Strategic Authorities: the Greater London Authority, all Mayoral Combined Authorities and all Mayoral Combined County Authorities will automatically begin as Mayoral Strategic Authorities. Those who meet specified eligibility criteria may be designated as Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities. This unlocks further devolution, most notably an Integrated Settlement.
3. The White Paper also made it clear that in the remaining 21 areas of England which have two-tier models of government, the existing county councils and district councils will be replaced by unitary authorities.
  4. The Government has written to all two-tier areas inviting them to submit proposals for local government reorganisation:
    - Interim Plans by 21 March 2025
    - Full Proposals by the Autumn 2025
  5. The date of submission of these final proposals differs, depending on where your area is in the Government's programme. The Government published the letters which it had sent to each area. Our letter is attached at Appendix 1.

## **THE POSITION IN LANCASHIRE**

6. The Government allowed authorities wishing to be in its priority programme for devolution to apply for the local elections in its area to be postponed for one year. Lancashire County Council did not request this, due to devolution plans already being underway, and Lancashire has therefore not been included in the Government's Devolution Priority Programme. Since then, the Lancashire County Combined Authority became a legal entity in February 2025.
7. It is expected that the newly formed Lancashire County Combined Authority will make proposals for it to move to a Mayoral Strategic Authority this Autumn. That is a decision for the Lancashire County Combined Authority and its Constituent Members: Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, and Blackpool Council.
8. With regard to a proposal for reorganisation, the Government's letter to the Lancashire authorities sets out in its annex the format of what is expected in the proposals and confirms that after submission the Government will consider the proposals and confirm whether it is accepted. If accepted, the Government would work with the councils to ensure that a shadow authority is in place as soon as possible. It is anticipated that should proposals be acceptable, then any new shadow authority would be in place by May 2027, with reorganisation of existing Councils by April 2028.
9. The government has asked two-tier areas, including Lancashire, to submit an Interim Plan by 21 March 2025. The plan should set out progress on developing proposals in line with criteria and guidance. There is recognition that the level of detail that is possible at this stage may vary from place to place but the expectation is that one interim plan is jointly submitted by all councils in the area.
10. Lancashire Leaders discussed the Interim Plan at their meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> March. At the meeting, a draft Lancashire letter (to be submitted as the Interim Plan) was discussed. The latest version is attached at Appendix 2.

11. The emerging and possible options for Local Government Reorganisation in Lancashire are set out below, with authorities focusing on the options of 3, 4 or 5 unitary councils. At the time of writing there is no support for either a 1 or a 2 unitary council option.

Options					
	1 x Unitary Council	2 x Unitary Councils	3 x Unitary Councils	4 x Unitary Councils	5 x Unitary Councils
Average Population	1.57m	750,000+	520,000+	390,000+	310,000+
Average Geographical area (square miles)	1,184	592	395	296	237

## IMPLICATIONS

**Policy:** No implications arising directly from this report.

**Financial:** None arising directly from this report. Financial implications will be part of the next phase of the work on options for the Autumn 2025 timescale.

**Legal:** This report provides an updated position in respect of the Government's White Paper and the emerging process for Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation. There are no legal implications at present, but these will be addressed as the proposals and process progresses.

**Risk Management:** None arising directly from this report. Risk considerations will be part of the next phase of the work on options.

**Health and Safety:** No implications arising directly from this report.

**Sustainability:** No implications arising directly from this report.

**Community Safety:** No implications arising directly from this report.

**Equality and Diversity:** No implications arising directly from this report.

## APPENDICES

Appendix 1- Draft Joint Lancashire Leaders Letter/Interim Plan

Appendix 2- Minister for State Jim McMahon MP - LGR invitation to Lancashire Leaders

Appendix 3- MHCLG LGR Presentation slides

## LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None