

**MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING
HELD AT NELSON TOWN HALL
ON 17th MARCH 2025**

PRESENT –

His Worship the Mayor (Councillor M. Aslam – in the Chair)

Councillors

<i>M. Adnan</i>	<i>Y. Iqbal</i>
<i>F. Ahmad</i>	<i>S. Land</i>
<i>N. Ahmed</i>	<i>D. Lord</i>
<i>S. Ahmed</i>	<i>A. Mahmood</i>
<i>M. Ammer</i>	<i>B. Newman</i>
<i>R. Anwar</i>	<i>R. O'Connor</i>
<i>A. Bell</i>	<i>M. Strickland</i>
<i>C. Church</i>	<i>M. Stone</i>
<i>D. Cockburn-Price</i>	<i>A. Sutcliffe</i>
<i>S. Cockburn-Price</i>	<i>Y. Tennant</i>
<i>D. Gallear</i>	<i>D. Whipp</i>
<i>M. Hanif</i>	
<i>D. Hartley</i>	

(Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Z. Ali, N. Butterworth, K. Salter and T. Whipp)



72. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were reminded of the legal requirements concerning the declaration of interests.

73. DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION

The Interim Chief Executive submitted a report which provided Council with an update on the Government's proposals regarding Devolution and Local Government Re-Organisation.

The Council was asked to note the current position and timetable; endorse the draft submission to the draft Joint Leaders letter which was being proposed as the Interim Plan submission to Government by 21st March, 2025; and consider whether the Council had an initial preference for any of the option(s) as detailed at point 11 in the submitted report.

Appendices to the submitted report were:

- ❖ 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

Councillor A. Mahmood, Leader of the Council introduced the report to Council and informed Members that since the Minister of State, Jim McMahon MP, wrote to all Lancashire Council Leaders back in early February, 2025, work had been on-going to see if all Lancashire authorities could put together a single response to Government, as requested in that February letter. Such a letter was also referred to as an Interim Plan, and submissions had to be made to Government by the 21st March 2025.

The draft letter contained in this report, and the latest version of it, now tabled at this meeting, was the culmination of several meetings held by Lancashire Leaders, these last few weeks. He added that it was Executive's view, and his own view, that Pendle Borough Council (PBC) should agree to sign this joint letter. He further added that the letter was the start of the process, not the end and it would give the Government a sense check of where various Councils across England were with their thinking on this matter.

He added that across England, there would be joint letters, with no preferences submitted, there would be joint letters where preferences were expressed. There would also be competing letters from within single County boundaries.

The Leader of the Council stated that he believed by signing this letter, PBC would begin the process of determining the future of the people of Pendle, a brighter future, where the democratic process remained at a local level, where services were delivered in a more localised environment, and in a more effective and efficient manner than they were today.

It would be a resource intensive process, with the immediate task of reviewing our partnerships with our neighbouring Councils to start the work of providing a Bid submission to Government by late November 2025. Councillor A. Mahmood added that he also believed that in addition to the letter to Government, Pendle Borough Council should also provide a covering letter, that clearly stated the preferred options PBC was willing to explore.

Using the Government's own current indicators, and the chart on page 3 of the report, he recommended that PBC states its preference for exploring only Options 3, 4 and 5 at this stage, and that the Council does not believe that Options 1 and 2 would provide the best and most effective local services, and democracy, to our communities.

He added that should Council agree to this course of action, he would instruct the Chief Executive to formulate an appropriate covering letter, that could be ratified as an item of Special Urgency at the Executive meeting on Thursday 20th March 2025. This would also give the Council some further days to analyse any responses to our proposal, by other agencies.

In conclusion, he added he hoped he could rely on the support of this Council to pave the way for Pendle not only to play our part in this process, but to lead the debate, where appropriate, and for us to provide the best possible positive impact and opportunity for all our communities.

Councillor A. Mahmood accordingly moved the above as the proposed course of action in this matter, which was seconded by Councillor M. Hanif.

Councillor D. Whipp enquired of the Leader of the Council as to what were the differences in the updated Appendix 1- Draft Joint Lancashire Leaders Letter/Interim Plan now tabled at this meeting as opposed to the version that had been circulated with the Council agenda papers? The Interim Chief Executive, at the request of the Leader of the Council, explained to Council the changes and differences in the content of the updated draft letter.

Councillor D. Whipp further added he could not support the motion as outlined by the Leader of the Council and explained his reasons to Council unless Option 3 was removed.

He reminded the Council of the Motion he had brought to Full Council on 19th December, 2024 on Local Government Organisation where Council had reaffirmed PBC's previous position opposing the creation of "monster Councils" and for local services and facilities to continue to be provided by truly local Councils sensitive to the needs of and accountable through the ballot box to local residents. Council had also resolved it believed that the White Paper would have significant short term and medium-term financial costs, not savings. That the impact on services would be severely detrimental and would create a massive democratic deficit with power being centralised further away and into fewer hands.

He added that Council had also resolved at the 19th December, 2025 meeting to work with neighbouring authorities, Burnley, Rossendale and Ribbles Valley to achieve the best possible outcome for local people with respect to the trust of local governance.

Councillor D Whipp also talked about the importance and future roles of Parish and Town Council's would play following devolution and the creation of Unitary Councils.

He further added that he could not support exploring Option 3 either and that PBC should state its preference for exploring only Options 4 and 5 at this stage as it was clear that only the options that could create 4 or 5 Unitary Councils in Lancashire would ensure the complex and urgent needs of our community were addressed, and that local democracy would underpin the work and decision making of any Unitary Council.

MOTION

The Leader of the Council agreed to change his motion to reflect the above with Option3 removed, which became the substantive motion.

Council further discussed this matter and expressed the view that by exploring Options 4 and 5, that these two options would ensure Unitaries of the right size, improve existing capacity, withstand financial shocks and delivering efficient and effective local government for our area. PBC was determined through this process, and based on these two options, to deliver services of the highest quality and sustainability to all within our community.

By signing the joint Lancashire letter, PBC would give its commitment to working together with all relevant partners and Councils in our area, to meet local needs informed by local views. Further PBC believed that its preferred options would not only support devolution structures in Lancashire but enhance the ability of such structures to excel and deliver real quality services and provide life changing opportunities for our communities. A significant bedrock of community engagement and neighbourhood engagement here in Pendle was the work of our local councillors, our community organisations, based on strong and connected communities through Parish and Town Councils.

The Council also expressed its strong desire to see this method further enhanced across the whole of any new Unitary area and structure. Council felt strongly that such structures, where they exist, could help not only the Unitary of choice but also the issue of devolution to the very heart of our communities, through their Parish and Town Councils.

Members of Pendle Borough Council also strongly expressed their concerns on the cost of writing bid submissions and Local Government reorganisation in general, adding that PBC was aware that from the last round of re-organisation, some District/Borough Councils had to contribute approximately £1.5m each, along with a much higher cost for a County Council, and to urge the

Minister to consider any financial assistance his department was able to give, that might reduce significant expenditure that should be spent on vital services to our communities.

AMENDED MOTION

An amended motion was moved by Councillor D. Whipp and seconded by Councillor N. Ahmed was voted on and carried, and this amendment then became the substantive motion and was voting on and carried.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the PBC states its preference for exploring only Options 4 and 5 at this stage;
- (2) That PBC agrees to endorse the All Lancashire Leaders' letter on Local Government Reorganisation in Lancashire to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution.
- (3) That a separate covering letter be sent to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution expressing PBC's preferred potential Unitary options, as per the "all Lancashire Leader's letter" along the other additional points as detailed in the pre-amble to these minutes as raised at this meeting.

His Worship the Mayor _____