

Report Title	Local Council Elections 2026
Meeting	Extraordinary Meeting of Council
Meeting Date	12 th January 2026
Report Author	Dean Langton Chief Executive
Directorate	
Lead Executive Member(s)	Cllr David Whipp Leader of the Council
Wards Affected	All
Public. Part Exempt, or Fully Exempt	Public
Appendices (if any)	App A – Letter from Alison McGovern MP, Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks the Council's view on the postponement or otherwise of the local elections scheduled to take place on 7th May 2026. This is in response to a request from the Government for the Council to submit a view, should it wish to do so.

2. Recommendations

For the reasons set out in this report, Council is recommended to:

- 2.1 in considering the letter attached at **Appendix A**, determine whether it wishes to express a view on the postponement or otherwise of the local elections scheduled for 7th May 2026;
- 2.2 subject to 2.1 above, and noting the deadline for submissions, give delegated authority to the Chief Executive to communicate that view on the Council's behalf.

3. Information: the Rationale & Evidence for the Recommendations

- 3.1 Councillors will be aware of the Government's ongoing reform of structures within Local Government, with the aim to replace the current two-tier system with new single-tier Unitary Councils.

- 3.2 The Government remains committed to achieving structural reforms in local government within the life of the current Parliament. Based on the latest published timetable, this will see elections to new Councils in May 2027 and those Councils going live in April 2028.
- 3.3 In compliance with the agreed timetable, towards the end of November the Council in partnership with Burnley Council, submitted a business case for a Five-Unitary Model of Unitary Local Government in Lancashire. There were four other business cases submitted by Lancashire Councils.
- 3.4 Across the Country, there are 21 areas (including Lancashire) that are subject to local government organisation (LGR). Of these:
- in Surrey, the Government has determined there will be two Unitary Councils;
 - in six other areas (covering 17 proposals), proposals are currently subject to statutory consultation;
 - in the remaining 14 areas (which includes Lancashire), the Government has indicated that they expect to launch a statutory consultation on proposals (of which there are over 50) in early February, for a seven week period.
- 3.5 In the latest set of submissions to Government, several Councils (not including Pendle) raised concerns about the constraints they are operating within and the likelihood that there will be an additional impact on capacity from work on LGR. According to the Government, some Councils have expressed concerns about *'their capacity to deliver a smooth and safe transition to a new Council alongside running resource intensive elections to'* and *'the cost to taxpayers of holding elections for'* Councils that may be shortly abolished.
- 3.6 The Government acknowledges that capacity constraints will vary between Councils and that Councils themselves are, therefore, best placed to judge the impact of holding elections whilst dealing with LGR. To that end, the Government is seeking Councils' views on the postponement or otherwise of local elections and whether this could release essential capacity to deliver LGR so that it progresses effectively.

The Council's Position

- 3.7 The working assumption up to this point is that the Council's elections will proceed as planned despite the impact of work on LGR (although it is fair to say that the requirement to support work on LGR has not been fully defined at this stage).
- 3.8 As part of the normal electoral cycle, the Council is due to hold elections for one-third of its seats in May 2026. Given the nature of the Council's Wards, 10 seats are due to be contested.

- 3.9 As Returning Officer, the Chief Executive's responsibility is to ensure that the election is administered effectively and that, as a result, the experience of voters and those standing for elections is a positive one. Part of this is having sufficient staff resources for all aspects of the election. Whilst numbers of staff in some parts of the process are determined by matters not yet known (number of candidates, likely turnout etc), experience of past elections provides a good indicator of the staffing capacity required.
- 3.10 Initial planning for the elections has already started and, as might be expected, work on this will become more intensive early in the New Year up to and including Polling Day on 7th May 2026. A Project Team (led by the Chief Executive (and the Returning Officer) and comprising the Director of Resources, Elections and Registration, Human Resources Manager and Communications Manager) will be established early in the New Year to provide oversight to the process. Both Polling Day and the Verification/Count on the following day require a significant increase in staffing resources, mostly drawn from within the Council.
- 3.11 Since the submission of business cases, work on LGR has continued, with the focus at present on establishing programme management arrangements across Lancashire. This is with a view to undertaking a range of preparatory work in advance of the Government's decision on the form of Unitary Local Government in Lancashire. Whilst it is not possible at this stage to say definitively what resource(s) the Council will be required to support these arrangements, it is inevitable that involvement in these matters will also intensify in coming months. In the initial stages (up to the decision in July 2026), it is expected to rest with the Chief Executive, Directors and Assistant Directors/Heads of Services along with some dedicated Programme Management Support.
- 3.12 As this illustrates, whilst there will be some inevitable overlap in resourcing given a small District Council like Pendle with a limited staffing resource, the operational delivery of the election and the programme management of LGR (given what is known at present) will tend to draw on different officers; there would appear to be no direct dependency between the two that would prevent them being managed in parallel (acknowledging also the Council's experience of managing multiple programmes of work during the course of normal activity). That said, not holding the elections will free up resource accordingly.
- 3.13 It is also worthwhile noting that, given the certainty with which LGR now appears to be proceeding, there is a need to review both the Council Plan priorities and the resourcing of LGR preparations in a wider context to ensure the Council is well placed in the discussions that will take place to establish the new Councils. Both matters are under consideration and will be the subject of reports to Councillors in due course.

Next Steps

- 3.14 The Government has invited views by no later than **midnight on Thursday 15th January 2026**. Subject to expressing a view, Council is asked to give delegated authority to the Chief Executive to communicate that view to Government by the deadline set.
- 3.15 It is worthwhile stressing that the decision to postpone the local elections rests with the Government and not the Council. As indicated in the letter at **Appendix A**, the Secretary of State is only minded to make an Order to postpone elections for one year for those Councils that raise capacity concerns.
4. **Link to Council Plan Priorities: (Providing High Quality Services and Facilities, Proud and Connected Communities and Places, Good Growth and Housing and Healthy Communities)**
- 4.1 There no policy implications arising directly from the contents of this report.

5. Implications

Financial Implications

- 5.1 Since this report is focussed on seeking the Council's view on this matter, there are no financial implications arising directly from the recommendations.
- 5.2 For information, it is estimated that the (marginal) cost of holding the local elections on 7th May 2026 will be c£100k.

Legal and Governance Implications

- 5.3 There are no Legal and Governance Implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

Climate and Biodiversity Implications

- 5.4 There are no climate and biodiversity implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

Human Resources Implications

- 5.5 There are no staffing implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.6 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from the recommendations made in this report.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 The letter from Government seeks the Council's view on the postponement or otherwise of the local elections in May 2026.

7. Alternative Options Considered

- 7.1 The draft Strategic Business Case includes a full Options Appraisal of the various proposed models of Unitary Local Government in Lancashire.

8. Statutory Officer Sign off (please put an x in the relevant box below)

Section 151 Officer	x
Monitoring Officer	x

9. Appendices

Appendix A – Letter from Minister of State for Local Government and Housing – December 2025

10. Background Documents

None

Contact Officers

Dean Langton
Chief Executive