

**NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION WORKING GROUP  
HELD ON 5<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2026**

*PRESENT*—

*Councillor A. Mahmood (in the Chair)*

## Councillors

*David Cockburn-Price*

*Mohammad Hanif*

*Ash Sutcliffe*

**Officers in attendance**

*Dean Langton*

*Chief Executive*

*Jane Watson*

### *Democratic Services Manager*

*(Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mohammed Iqbal, Dorothy Lord and Lola Whipp).*



### 3.

## MINUTES

**AGREED**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> May be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4.

## DEVELOPING THE STRUCTURAL CHANGE ORDER

The Group were presented with a report which provided an update on the decisions taken by Ministers on matters that would be included in the Structural Change Order (SCO) the secondary legislation that would both create the new Unitary Councils in Lancashire and abolish existing Councils.

This was following the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MCHLG) decision on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2026 to move forward with the implementation of the four Unitary proposal submitted by Chorley Borough Council, Lancaster City Council, Preston City Council, Ribble Valley Borough Council, South Ribble Borough Council and West Lancashire Borough Council.

A subsequent letter from MHCLG on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2026 set out details that would be included in the SCO and a summary of the matters that Ministers had taken decisions on which would be included in the SCO.

The Group were advised that the SCO provided the transitional arrangements between the creation of the new Unitary Councils and the abolition of existing Councils. Existing Councils would remain responsible for the delivery of services in their area until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2028 and the following key points were set out in the SCO:

- Existing Councils would be under a duty to co-operate with each other and with the new Councils up until they were abolished.
- Elections for the 'Shadow' Councils would take place in May 2027.
- 'Shadow' Councils would be provided with 'preparatory functions, including preparation of budgets and plans to enable them to assume local government functions and powers on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2028.
- It would provide for the new Unitary Councils to operate with a Leader and Cabinet Model, allow them to appoint Statutory Officers and to adopt Codes of Conduct and a Scheme of Members Allowances.

In relation to matters considered by the Group at the last meeting, Ministers had made decisions in relation to a number of issues including the names of the new councils and the number of councillors. For the Pendle area the new council would be called Pennine Lancashire and would have 95 councillors: 27 from Blackburn with Darwen, 18 from Burnley, 18 from Pendle, 17 from Hyndburn and 15 from Rossendale.

A Statutory Joint Committee would be created for each new Unitary Council, and its role was to oversee the preparation and delivery of an implementation plan (not to make decisions) and would only exist once the SCO was made in Parliament (likely to be March 2027) until the election of the 'Shadow' Council in May 2027.

It was reported that Blackburn with Darwen had suggested amending the number of places they had on the Statutory Joint Committee for Pennine Lancashire from 8 to 4 so long as they retain the Chair of the Committee. It was noted that with regards to any changes Ministers had been clear that they would consider any further unanimous suggestions (from all Councils in the Unitary area) no later than 17<sup>th</sup> August 2026.

Reference was made to the Implementation Team which was being led by the Head of Paid Services for Lancashire County Council as the Senior Responsible Officer. Four Deputy Senior Responsible Officers (DRSO) had been appointed for each Unitary Council with the Head of Paid Service from Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council appointed as the DSRO for Pennine Lancashire.

In relation to elections the SCO included provisions to allow planned local elections in 2027 to be replaced with the elections to the 'Shadow' Councils. Town and Parish Council elections would be aligned with the electoral cycle of the new Unitary Councils.

Funding of £900k per new Unitary Council (£3.6m for Lancashire as a whole) would be provided by the Government to support the effective establishment of new Unitary Councils. A further £150k per new Unitary Council (£600K for Lancashire as a whole) would also be provided for Children's Services, Adult Social Care and Public Health Leadership capacity and continuity.

There was a discussion around the handover of assets, and it was reported that these would be automatically transferred to the successive authority. Provision had been made in S16 and S24 Agreements which bound the Council into discussions with the new Unitary Council's about assets.

## **AGREED**

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the proposal from Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council to change their representation on the Joint Committee from 8 to 4 be supported.

## **5. WARDING ARRANGEMENTS**

The Group were presented with a report which sought their views on a proposal for the Warding of the Pendle part of the new Unitary Council. This followed on from consideration of this matter at the last meeting and was necessary given a clarification from Government on the boundaries that could be used to determine new Wards.

It was reported that recent advice from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was that Polling Districts were not considered to be a unit of electoral area in law (its primary purpose was to allocate electors to a particular polling place and polling station) and so could not be used for the purposes of splitting Wards. Only County Divisions, District Wards and Parish Wards could be used.

It had therefore been necessary to re-consider the Warding of the Pendle Part of the new Unitary Council. In reviewing the boundaries for County Divisions, District Wards and Parish Wards for Pendle, it was found they were all different. As

originally proposed it was not possible to use County Divisions only given the size of the Pendle Rural Ward.

However, it had been identified that Parish Ward boundaries (including Parish Councils that were not Warded) did align with the Pendle Rural Division boundary and within the division, Parish Ward boundaries did provide a reasonable split of the division into 3 Wards (As shown in Appendices A, B and C attached to the report). In essence, these boundaries were the same as Polling District Boundaries.

Therefore, the proposal previously agreed by the Group remained unchanged though it was now based on electoral area units that were acceptable in law (and, therefore to the Government). This resulted in there being 3 Councillors each in the 4 Wards (that mirrored existing County Divisions) and 2 Councillors in 3 Wards (covering Pendle Rural Division) a total of 18 Councillors.

## **AGREED**

That the Warding proposal set out in the report for submission as part of a consolidated response on Warding to the Government from Lancashire Councils be noted.

Chair \_\_\_\_\_