



## **Lancashire Association of Local Councils**

### **Minutes of the 80th Annual General Meeting of the Association**

held on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2025 at 2.30 pm  
at Lancashire County Council County Hall, Preston

#### **Present**

Cllr Pat Hastings (Chair)  
Cllr Alan Neal (President)  
Cllr Phil Orme (Vice President)  
\*\*Member Councils

#### **Officers present:**

Debra Platt, Chief Officer  
Jessica Dibble, LALC Secretary

John Ashurst, Area Support Officer  
Val Watson, Training Coordinator

#### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all attendees to the 81st Annual General Meeting of the Lancashire Association of Local Councils (LALC).

Apologies were conveyed on behalf of the keynote speaker, Amria Khatun (MHCLG), who was unable to attend due to personal circumstances. Ms Khatun had been scheduled to speak on Devolution and the Re-organisation of Town, Parish and Neighbourhood Councils, with a view of providing national insight into ongoing local government changes.

The Chair recorded appreciation on behalf of LALC to Mr Alex Downard, Head of Population Health and Strategic Operations at Lancashire County Council, for agreeing to step in at short notice to deliver a presentation on Devolution in Lancashire and Local Government Reorganisation.

It was noted that there would be a brief opportunity for questions following Mr Downard's presentation. The Chair also advised that any specific questions arising from the discussion would be collated and forwarded to Ms Khatun for her comments following meeting.

#### **2. Speaker: Alex Downard, Head of Population Health and Strategic Operations (Public Health), Lancashire County Council**

Cabinet member, Mr Alex Downard provided an update on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Lancashire. He advised that the County Council Cabinet would meet on 27 November 2025, with its preferred option for reorganisation to be submitted to Westminster on 28 November 2025.

He reported that 63% of residents responding to the recent consultation had opposed devolution, although engagement levels varied across the county.

Lancashire is pursuing a Level 2 'Devolution Deal', which does not currently require a directly elected mayor, although this may be introduced at a later stage. The deal is expected to devolve approximately £20 million of funding per year, with responsibilities for education, transport and economic development transferring to the Lancashire Combined County Authority.

Mr Downard explained that the proposed Local Government Reorganisation would replace the existing fifteen councils, twelve district and three upper-tier with new unitary authorities within the next eighteen months. The objective of reorganisation is to improve efficiency, reduce duplication, and strengthen local service delivery. He noted that government criteria require proposed unitary authorities to serve a minimum population of around 500,000 to ensure financial sustainability. Smaller units, such as those with populations of 200,000 to 300,000, were considered unlikely to be self-sufficient. While this threshold has been applied nationally, Mr Downard acknowledged that exceptions exist elsewhere, such as in parts of Greater Manchester. Earlier proposals for smaller units in Lancashire had been rejected by the Secretary of State in line with the current guidance.

During a brief question session, members sought clarification on several issues. In response to questions on the costs of reorganisation, Mr Downard confirmed that there would be significant financial implications, but guidance had not yet been issued regarding how these costs would be met or apportioned between central and local government.

When asked about the possible introduction of a directly elected mayor, Mr Downard noted that while a mayor was not currently required under the Level 2 deal, it was widely anticipated that Lancashire would move to a mayoral model in future. He acknowledged concerns about low voter turnout in other areas but explained that the structure and governance model would be determined as part of the next phase of the process.

A further question was raised regarding concurrent funding for parish councils under the new arrangements. Mr Downard advised that no information was yet available on this matter and that detailed guidance had not been issued. He reiterated that the current focus remained on establishing the governance structure, with further clarification expected once national decisions had been made.

Cllr. Hastings thanked Mr Downard for his time today and for speaking on a subject which is particularly challenging during a time of uncertainty.

*2:56pm Mr Downard left the meeting.*

### **3. Minutes of the meetings to consider.**

#### **3.1 Minutes of the 80th Annual General Meeting 2 November 2024**

The minutes of the 80th Annual General Meeting held on 2 November 2024 were considered. Members raised concerns that the record of discussion regarding the appointment of the President had not accurately reflected the

decision taken at that meeting. It was noted that the meeting in 2024 had agreed not to proceed with a vote on the appointment of President at that time, as due process under the Constitution had not been followed, and that this context should be included for completeness and transparency.

It was agreed that the minutes would be amended to reflect these points and circulated to members for confirmation. Subject to these amendments, the minutes were to be approved as a true and accurate record and would be brought to the Executive Committee in December for final ratification.

Proposed: Cllr Keith Martin

Seconded: Cllr Phil Orme

### **3.2 Minutes of the Extra-ordinary General Meeting 12 August 2025**

The minutes of the EGM were approved as a correct and accurate record.

Proposed: Cllr Keith Martin

Seconded: Cllr Phil Orme

## **4. Appointment to Honorary Roles of President and Vice President(s)**

### **4.1 President – Alan Neal**

The Chair advised that one nomination had been received for each honorary role: Cllr Alan Neal for President and Cllr Phil Orme for Vice President. Both nominees were then invited to speak at the meeting.

Cllr Alan Neal outlined his long term commitment with LALC, first joining in 1987. He emphasised his dedication to fairness, equality, and representation across all member councils, noting the importance of supporting both Town and Parish Councils through forthcoming structural and devolution changes. He stated that, if elected, he would continue to champion the interests of Lancashire councils at both regional and national level, as he had done previously through his work with NALC and other representative bodies.

Following the statements, members were asked to vote. The members voted in favour of appointing Cllr Alan Neal as President, with one abstention recorded.

### **4.2 Vice President – Phil Orme**

Cllr Phil Orme addressed the meeting and confirmed his continued commitment to supporting LALC and the wider local council sector across Lancashire and the North West. He reaffirmed his intention to represent member councils with integrity and to act in their best interests.

A vote was then taken, with the majority of members voting in favour of Cllr Phil Orme's appointment as Vice President and one vote recorded against.

### **4.3 Appointment of Auditor for 2025/2026 - proposed to be JDH Business Services Ltd, Flintshire.**

Members considered the appointment of auditors for the 2025/2026 financial year. It was recommended that JDH Business Services Ltd, Flintshire, continue as the Association's auditors.

It was confirmed that JDH Business Services had been appointed following the withdrawal of the previous Treasurer and auditors, and had successfully completed two audit cycles for LALC. This appointment would therefore represent their third consecutive year in post.

Members discussed the merits of continuing with the current auditors for a further year to ensure continuity and consistency, with an intention to review alternative providers, including firms based in Lancashire, ahead of the next financial year.

Clarification was provided that the auditors act independently of the LALC's financial administration, which is managed by the Chief Officer and Secretary in the absence of an appointed Treasurer. Members were informed that efforts would continue to find a suitable candidate for the vacant Treasurer position.

Following discussion, the members voted in favour of appointing JDH Business Services Ltd as auditors for 2025/2026, with a majority vote in favour.

In line with the Constitution, Cllr Alan Neal then assumed the Chair of the AGM meeting in his capacity as President.

## **5. Reports**

### **5.1 Finance - Audited accounts 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025**

The members received the audited accounts for the financial year ending 31 March 2025, which were included in the agenda papers.

Questions were raised to the Chief Officer regarding elements of the financial report. It was confirmed that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) funding from Lancashire County Council, received late in the previous financial year, would continue to support activities throughout the current and following year. It was noted that no further SLA contribution had yet been received.

A query was raised regarding the level of general reserves (£105,000). Members were advised that these reserves would be used to support future development projects and sector improvement initiatives. The Executive Committee would determine specific allocations once the NALC budget and subscription rates were confirmed, as these directly affect LALCs financial planning.

It was noted that NALC's indicative increase for 2025/26 was approximately 8.3%, compared with 5.3% in the previous year, and that the Executive Committee would need consider the impact on LALC's membership fees and budget priorities accordingly.

Members noted the improved financial position compared with previous years. One member felt that the current level of reserves represented a marked improvement from the financial challenges faced in recent years.

It was recognised that the reserves will provide flexibility to fund projects such as training, support for Area Committees, and potential initiatives linked to Local Government Reorganisation and devolution.

Members also requested continued clarity on how the Association's £50,000 annual contribution to NALC benefits LALC and its member councils. It was noted that the Chair and President would raise this at the NALC AGM on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

The audited accounts for 2024/2025 were received and noted.

Proposed: Cllr Phil Orme

Seconded: Cllr Greera Stevenson

Vote: Majority in favour, one abstention.

**5.2 Constitution - to receive the adopted 2025 Constitution and appendices agreed at the Extra-ordinary General Meeting on 12 August 2025.**

Members noted the 2025 revised Constitution and appendices as agreed at the Extra-ordinary General Meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2025.

**5.3 Annual Report - delivered by Chair**

Chair's report was noted by members.

**5.4 Chief Officer Report – circulated in the papers**

Members considered the Chief Officer's Report, which had been included in the meeting pack.

Questions were raised regarding the timing and circulation of the agenda papers. Several members expressed concern that the Chief Officer's Report and accompanying documents had only recently been made available. It was suggested that, in future, papers be circulated to all member councils and clerks earlier to allow sufficient time for internal discussion and feedback.

The Chief Officer responded that all documents had been published on the LALC website in advance of the meeting, although the final version of the pack was uploaded close to the event due to amendments required to reflect the change of guest speaker.

Members agreed that improved timelines for the publication and circulation of AGM papers should be considered by the Executive Committee, with the aim of ensuring greater consistency. Subject to these observations, the Chief Officer's Report was received and noted.

**6. Motions from Member Councils**

The Chair noted that a motion had been received for consideration at the AGM. However, it was determined that the submission did not constitute a motion for AGM resolution, as the matters raised related to constitutional

provisions. Therefore, was agreed that the items be referred to the Executive Committee for discussion, as any changes of this nature would require a formal constitutional amendment rather than a standard motion.

The Chair confirmed that a motion submitted by LALC to NALC on Net Zero energy development has been accepted. It was noted that the motion calls on NALC to advocate for urgent national action to ensure that local knowledge is integrated through effective engagement with Town and Parish Councils at the earliest stages of Net Zero energy development.

It was further noted that the form and submission process used by NALC for the receipt of motions was very user-friendly, and that LALC would look to adopt a similar template for use in its own motion submissions in future years.

## **7. Open Forum**

It was suggested that LALC consider having a presence at the Royal Lancashire Show, providing an opportunity to showcase the work of Town and Parish Councils across the county and to promote public awareness of their role. Members agreed this would be a positive initiative and that the Association should explore participation for the next event.

Further discussion took place around asset transfers in the context of Local Government Reorganisation. It was noted that larger town councils may already have experience of managing such processes and could share best practice with smaller councils. Members emphasised the importance of retaining community assets in public ownership where possible and learning from other authorities that have successfully undertaken transfers.

Several members supported the idea of forming working groups to focus on key areas such as Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and Highways. It was agreed that the Executive Committee would consider establishing these groups to ensure members' expertise and feedback are incorporated into future planning.

A proposal was also raised regarding the election of the Chair of the Association, with suggestions that the position might, in future, be elected directly by the membership at the AGM rather than by the Executive Committee. The President clarified that under the current Constitution, the Chair and Vice Chair are appointed by the Executive Committee at its first meeting following the AGM. Members acknowledged the need to ensure clarity and consistency in the terminology used and agreed that this matter should be reviewed by the Executive Committee at a future meeting.

## **8. Close of Meeting**

In closing, the President Cllr. Alan Neal encouraged members to focus on the current Constitution and future direction of LALC, rather than historic practices, and confirmed that any constitutional ambiguities would be considered by the Executive Committee as part of ongoing work.

The next meeting of the Executive Committee was confirmed for Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

The President closed the meeting and thanked all attendees for their presence and Officers for the organisation.

Meeting closed:16:03