

26 March 2026

## **Statutory consultation for the Local Government Reorganisation proposals for Lancashire**

This seeks views on the proposals that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has received following the Secretary of State's the invitation to the unitary councils (Blackpool UA, Blackburn with Darwen UA and Lancashire CC) and district councils (Fylde, Lancaster, Preston, Ribble Valley, Burnley, Chorley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Rossendale, South Ribble and West Lancashire) to submit proposals for unitary councils for their areas.

This response is submitted on behalf of the Lancashire Association of Local Councils (LALC) representing over 80% of the councils in Lancashire.

### Key Messages

- There are 200+ parish and town councils in Lancashire whose vital role in providing essential local public services, giving a democratic voice to local communities. These councils are deeply rooted in these communities and best placed to advocate for them.
- Effective devolution and local government reorganisation must recognise the role of parish and town councils. It is hoped that by strengthening their role and expanding their coverage, devolution will deliver tangible benefits for communities nationwide.
- Local government reorganisation will be worthwhile if it achieves new unitary authorities of sufficient size, scale and footprint to enable parish & town councils to be enabled to take on a bigger role where there is the capacity, and for new parish and town councils to be established.
- The county associations of local councils like us have a powerful and important voice which must be listened to from the start and throughout the process of creating the new unitary authorities. LALC is well equipped to contribute to the reorganisation process and support adequate resourcing and support for parish and town councils to ensure the process has long and short-term benefits.
- Throughout the process of reorganisation thought should be given to ways to enable effective partnership and collaboration. A key point should be to include LALC as a member of the Joint Implementation Team that are set up to establish the new unitary authorities. These authorities will need a revised charter, a dedicated parish/town council liaison officer, regular engagement with LALC and support in the provision of training.

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- To ensure Neighbourhood Area Committees meet the ambition set out by the government, consideration should also be given to mechanisms to enable effective implementation and collaboration. LALC has Area Committees which can be utilised to work with the Neighbourhood Area Committees.

### Consultation response

LALC cannot respond on the form but has encouraged the towns and parishes in Lancashire to individually respond. As a county-based association LALC is not able to support any of the suggested formats as our membership have differing views.

LALC does support:

- the move to a two-tier system of local government
- the proposals around population size seem reasonable
- the proposals for Neighbourhood Councils based on Area Committees model a
- encouraging the establishment of new Parish Councils
- there seems consensus around the numbers of cllrs based on the 500,000 population model.

LALC is pleased that the white paper sets out the government's position and commitment to "work with the town and parish council sector to improve engagement between them and local authorities" and supporting stronger community engagement" and to "rewire the relationship between town and parish councils and principal local authorities, strengthening expectations on engagement and community voice".

The National Association of Local Councils of which LALC is the county-based Association has also welcomed statements made by ministers, including in Parliament, which further underscore the government's recognition and support for parish and town councils:

- *"At a neighbourhood level, we see town and parish councils playing a critical role in devolution"*
- *"This Government absolutely values the crucial role played by town and parish councils in local government. We know people value the role of governance at the community scale. We want to see stronger community arrangements when reorganisation happens in the way councils engage at a neighbourhood or area level"*
- *"As we continue to develop our longer-term strategy for communities, I am firmly committed to working together, and with the wider parish sector so that our approach is informed by those who understand the diverse and complex challenges that our communities face. I look forward to our continued collaboration as we take forward this important work".*

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- *"We genuinely do continue to value the role of town and parish councils in moving forward. All the priorities that I know are so close to the hearts of all those who take part in parish and town councils. And I know how effective you are delivering local services. I've seen it over many years of engagement, and we want to make sure that there's a simplified, standard system of local area working, but that to strengthen the ability of local authorities to work with and engage with communities, really genuinely complementing the work of town and parish councils where they exist"*

As the representative body for parish and town councils, NALC is actively working with and supporting our members and county associations to respond to and support the devolution agenda. In the same spirit we will be working constructively with the government and parliamentarians on the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill now it is proceeding through Parliament.

LALC's comments primarily focus on the prospects for parish and town councils in any unitary authority outcome. In general, these reorganisations will be worthwhile if they achieve new unitary authorities of sufficient size, scale and footprint to enable parish councils to be empowered and take on a bigger role where they have the will and the capacity, and for new parish and town councils to be established where they do not currently exist.

Lancashire is a large diverse county with its largest town being Preston. It is made up of diverse community; the east of the county is marked by the Pennines which feeds the three main rivers. To the west there are the established holiday resorts and down the centre and to the south and east the industrial heartland. As a result of the geography, history and population mix the county has developed very distinct and unique communities. This is reflected in the five separate suggested models for devolution.

We welcome the public consultations from the higher tier authorities Blackpool UA, Blackburn with Darwen UA and Lancashire County Council and the local presentation by the district councils to our Area Committees but do not feel LALC as a county-based organisation can support any individual Proposal.

Below we set out our response on those parts of the consultation which we feel we can respond collectively for our members:

- The experience of local government reorganisations over the past 10-15 years from elsewhere in England we ask that the new Unitaries understand the part that LALC can contribute to the design and implementation of any new unitary principal authority arrangements with parish/town.
- It is important that LALC is equipped to contribute to the reorganisation process through collaboration, communication and cooperation.

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- LALC must be involved as a full member of the Joint Implementation Team established in each new unitary authority.
- To enable the local grass roots democratic voice is heard in unparished areas as part of the reorganisation process new Parish councils need to be established. This must be part of the design of the new unitary authorities, and the process should start at the earliest opportunity and not be left until after the new unitary authorities are established.
- A key task of the Joint Implementation Team must be to develop and ensure adoption of a charter (some already exist but the new Unitaries should not rely on updating old documents) which sets out the roles, respective responsibilities and relationships between the unitary authority and the parish/town council sector, including matters concerned with resources and assets such as property. It is important that this charter must take account of the varying size, capacity and ambition within parish/town councils, including the prospective circumstances of any new parish and town councils which are due to be created.
- It is critical that parish/town councils are consulted at the earliest opportunity when assets and services may be changed or withdrawn to allow time for new processes to be established at local level. Affected councils need to be given the opportunity to negotiate taking on of assets, services or responsibilities.
- Parish/town councils are only able to raise a precept (their small share of council tax and primary source of income) annually and must demonstrate both financial viability and adequate consultation if they are to take on devolved assets and/or services. Unlike principal authorities, parish/town councils do not receive revenue support grant, a share of business rates or have access to government grant funds. Any proposed devolution of assets or services must be accompanied by appropriate funding support such as through Community Infrastructure Levy to help local communities particularly in the rural parts of the county.
- LALC strongly support the need for a key role played by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in providing a critical dispassionate view during the reorganisation process that reflects an agreed set of criteria such as size, resources, democratic accountability and local support.
- LALC feel that the successful proposal must be the one which most clearly outlines how new unitary authorities will collaborate meaningfully with parish/town councils.
- The government should offer greater clarity and intent in its approach to stakeholder engagement regarding local government reorganisation and

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proposals by principal authorities. The successful proposal should be the one which best harnesses the robust partnership mechanisms listed above.

LALC is the representative body for parish/town councils in Lancashire which are the democratic councils closest to local people and communities. Genuine neighbourhood involvement cannot be achieved without the new Unitaries working with the expertise and insight of LALC and its members who are already embedded in local governance.