
COUNCIL

Thursday, 26th March, 2026

Present: Councillor Josh Allen (Mayor), Councillors Judith Addison, Vanessa Alexander, Heather Anderson, Mike Booth, Scott Brerton, Danny Cassidy, Andrew Clegg, Jodi Clements, Loraine Cox, Paul Cox, Munsif Dad BEM JP, Bernard Dawson MBE, Stewart Eaves, Peter Edwards, Melissa Fisher, Andy Gilbert, David Heap, Zak Khan, Clare McKenna, Dave Parkins, Joyce Plummer, Clare Pritchard, Steven Smithson, Kate Walsh, Kimberley Whitehead, Clare Yates and Mohammed Younis

Apologies: Councillors Noordad Aziz, Stephen Button, Shabir Fazal OBE, Kath Pratt, Ethan Rawcliffe and Tina Walker

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting. He remarked that time had flown by and that this would be his final full meeting as Chair. He also thanked everyone for their support and goodwill during his time in office.

A brief statement followed about the filming of proceedings and filming generally within the Town Hall, followed by a fire safety announcement.

The Mayor also highlighted the newly installed conference system and provided a brief introduction to the operation of the microphones.

365 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Stephen Button, Shabir Fazal OBE, Kath Pratt, Ethan Rawcliffe and Tina Walker. Apologies were also submitted on behalf of Councillor Noordad Aziz who was likely to miss the early part of the meeting due to travel issues. The meeting had, in fact, ended before the arrival of Councillor Aziz.

366 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no formal declarations of interest or declarations of dispensations submitted.

367 Announcements

The Mayor made the following announcements:

1) The Mayoral Year

Councillor Allen reiterated his thanks to members for their support during his mayoral year. He added that the task had not always been easy, but was grateful that his predecessor Councillor Booth had set the tone for respectful debate in the Council Chamber. He also thanked the officers for their guidance and confirmed that his year in the role had been memorable.

Looking towards the forthcoming local elections, the Mayor went on to thank those councillors who had decided not to stand for re-election in 2026 for their service and hard

work for the community. It was not easy to stand for public office and required heart, courage and passion.

The Mayor commented that he had planned a lengthy speech, but would find this very difficult to deliver. He referred to his deselection by the Conservative party in October, which he considered was due to a decision by two political colleagues present this evening. He had found this particularly hurtful, as he had been a party member for some 15 years, dedicating half of his life to the political cause. As a consequence, he announced his resignation from the Conservative political group on the Council with immediate effect. He also announced that he intended to stand as an independent candidate for the Immanuel ward at the local election.

The Mayor also placed on record his thanks to Councillors Zak Khan, Danny Cassidy and Judith Addison for their support throughout his time as a Conservative member and noted that it had been an honour to serve in that capacity. He finished by thanking the residents who had put their trust in a 20+ year old and joked that many had been kind enough to provide him with tea and biscuits when raising ward issues with him.

The Leader of the Council gave a message of support to the Mayor and noted that he had executed his role with courage and passion. He added that Councillor Allen's mother and grandfather (both now deceased) would have been proud to see him serve and to represent the Council as a whole at civic engagements. He wished him good fortune for the future.

Councillor Munsif Dad BEM JP then made the following announcements:

2) Diversity and Inclusivity

The Leader commented that these were difficult times for those in power, not just when shaping policy, but also around how people perceived each other. He believed that some political groups held views which were potentially divisive. Antisemitism and islamophobia seemed to be on the rise. One example of this was the criticism from some quarters about an open iftar event held in Trafalgar Square on 16th March 2026.

The UK was noted for welcoming all faiths. Citizens were encouraged not to let fear take over. Councillor Dad called for people to act with dignity and respect for others. Every person deserved to feel safe. It was important to challenge hateful rhetoric and to stand together.

3) Definition of Anti-Muslim Hostility

The Leader read out loud the Government's recent non-statutory definition of anti-Muslim hostility, which was as follows:

"Anti-Muslim hostility is intentionally engaging in, assisting or encouraging criminal acts – including acts of violence, vandalism, harassment, or intimidation, whether physical, verbal, written or electronically communicated – that are directed at Muslims because of their religion or at those who are perceived to be Muslim, including where that perception is based on assumptions about ethnicity, race or appearance.

It is also the prejudicial stereotyping of Muslims, or people perceived to be Muslim including because of their ethnic or racial backgrounds or their appearance, and treating them as a collective group defined by fixed and negative characteristics, with the intention of encouraging hatred against them, irrespective of their actual opinions, beliefs or actions as individuals.

It is engaging in unlawful discrimination where the relevant conduct – including the creation or use of practices and biases within institutions – is intended to disadvantage Muslims in public and economic life.”

The Government was committed to taking sustained action to keep Muslims safe. The Council welcomed the above approach, although considered that it did not go far enough. However, this was a good start.

4) Burtens Chambers and Accrington Market Hall

With the permission of the Mayor, the Leader of the Council invited Councillor Clare Pritchard, Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Town Centres to speak. Councillor Pritchard announced that the Council had recently awarded the contract for the fitting-out works at Burtens Chambers to Senator, which had its UK headquarters and local sites in Altham and Huncoat. This was a coup for the local economy and was potentially a greener solution.

The tender for the Accrington Market Hall refit would be out soon and it was equally hoped that local firms would apply.

5) Local Government Reorganisation

The Leader indicated that a press release had been issued by the Government yesterday about Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The press release summarised the Government’s unitary proposals for each of the following areas who had submitted their various preferred options in 2025:

- East Sussex and Brighton and Hove (to be determined);
- Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock (5 unitary proposal);
- Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton (5 unitary proposal);
- Norfolk (3 unitary proposal);
- Suffolk (3 unitary proposal);
- West Sussex (to be determined).

Councillor Dad noted that the above outcomes were quite mixed. It was uncertain as to whether any predictions could be made in relation to the anticipated proposals for Lancashire, based on the decisions as outlined to date.

The Leader confirmed that he was continuing to work with the other Leaders and Chief Executives across Lancashire to drive LGR forward. The Leaders and senior officers from East Lancashire all attended frequent meetings and frank and constructive discussions were taking place.

6) Local Plan

The Leader indicated that the authority had submitted an expression of interest in January 2026 for additional Government grant funding to start the new Local Plan early under the new plan-making system. If successful, the Council would receive some £108k and would work proactively to deliver this.

7) Council Tax Arrears

With the permission of the Mayor, the Leader of the Council invited Councillor Clare Yates to speak on an initiative proposed by the Council's controlling group. Councillor Yates indicated that residents had brought some concerns to her attention around Council Tax and debt and had asked if councillors could look into the issue. The Labour group supported a position where:

- No resident should be pushed into deeper debt or distress because of how Council Tax arrears were managed.
- Enforcement measures should only ever be used as a genuine last resort.
- A compassionate, trauma informed, resident focused approach would improve communication, reduce long term debt, and increase sustainable repayment.
- The Council should explore all options to strengthen support for low-income residents, including examining the feasibility of moving towards a 100% Council Tax Support scheme, acknowledging the financial challenges but recognising the need for long term solutions.

Councillor Yates commenced reading a list of proposals developed by the Labour group. However, the Mayor ruled that the points proposed were, in fact, asking the Council to commit to a particular course of action and that the information provided did not, therefore, constitute an announcement. Councillor Khan enquired if the comments had been taken from a draft motion, which had had not met the eligibility criteria. The Leader acknowledged that the intention had been to bring a motion on this matter, however, given that the suggestions had come initially from residents, he had now asked officers to look directly into the issues raised.

8) Playgrounds Grant Funding

Councillor Dad announced that the Council had been allocated up to £270k in additional funding from the Government's £18m Playgrounds Fund, aimed at improving play areas for local communities. Hyndburn was one of 66 local authorities in the country to receive a share of this funding. The allocation was in addition to £250k Pride In Place Impact funding already committed within the Council's 2026/27 budget for improvements to play areas, with sites in Rishton and Accrington currently identified. Recent and current projects included the following:

- completed improvements at Rhyddings Park in Oswaldtwistle;
- works underway at Knuzden Play Area; and
- planned upgrades at Gatty Park in Accrington to commence imminently.

9) Retiring Councillors

The Leader thanked all councillors whose terms of office were due to expire following the forthcoming elections, including those who were seeking re-election and those who were retiring. He noted that Councillors Danny Cassidy, Andrew Clegg, Peter Edwards and Kimberley Whitehead had already made public their intention to stand down in May. He commented that all had served their resident well. For those who were seeking re-election he wished them good luck.

The Mayor also offered his thanks to those councillors seeking re-election, as it was not known if they would be successful. He indicated that whatever the outcome of the elections, members could be proud to have played a vital role in setting up Hyndburn for a positive future. David Welsby, Chief Executive, added his thanks to all councillors for their service. The role of a councillor was a difficult one and was becoming more difficult each day. He also thanked the Mayor and wished him well for the future.

With the agreement of the Mayor the following Councillors were given permission to speak:

- Councillor Zak Khan paid tribute to the Mayor and to his colleagues, Councillors Peter Edwards and Danny Cassidy.
- Councillor Kimberley Whitehead thanked the Mayor, the Leader of the Council, all other councillors and officers. She spoke about her increasing focus on her role as Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire and her personal history, which had led her to take a particular interest in that role. She paid tribute to Councillors Edward Blake and Marlene Haworth, who had sadly passed away during their terms of office. She also mentioned, the positive influence of her step-grandmother, Councillor Pam Barton (deceased). She recalled some of her own achievements, particularly around sporting matters, and shared some thoughts about what personal qualities were needed to be an effective councillor.
- Councillors Heather Anderson, Melissa Fisher, Clare Pritchard and Mohammed Younis all indicated their thanks to the Mayor and paid tribute to Councillors Cassidy, Clegg, Edwards, and Whitehead, as appropriate.
- Councillor Paul Cox wish all the retiring councillors well and paid tribute, in particular, to fellow ward councillor and close friend Andy Clegg.

368 Confirmation of Minutes

The Minutes of the Council meeting held on 26th February 2026 were provided.

Resolved - **That the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 26th February 2026 be approved as a correct record.**

369 Question Time

Two eligible questions had been received, which were set out in the report. The Mayor read out the questions as submitted.

1) Council Complaints Procedure

To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Munsif Dad BEM JP) or relevant Portfolio Holder Submitted by Councillor Scott Brerton on behalf of Mr Peter Shaw

“The Council’s complaints procedure is designed to refer a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman if it is rejected at stage two. This effectively creates a third stage to the process.

The Ombudsman will only deal with cases which directly affect an individual or a group of people. This prevents complaints relating to Council practices and procedures being referred to a third stage.

Will the Council modify the complaints procedure to provide a third stage independent review that doesn’t need the Ombudsman to rule?”

Response: The Leader thanked Mr Shaw for his question. He stated that the Council took all complaints seriously and that the authority actively monitored them, with reports to both the Cabinet and Standards Committee and via the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Report. Generally, the number of formal complaints was low and the LGSCO had not raised any concerns with the authority

The complaints procedure had been reviewed a few years ago and a decision had been taken to reduce the number of internal stages from three to two. For most complaints a right of appeal to the LGSCO was available, effectively providing a third and final stage. To introduce a third stage for those limited complaints which were not within the remit of the LGSCO did not appear to be proportionate and could be particularly burdensome as staff planned for Local Government Reorganisation. The current approach was sound. However, a much larger successor unitary authority might have a more comprehensive complaints procedure and the additional resource to address the issue raised by Mr Shaw.

2) State of the Roads

To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Munsif Dad BEM JP) or relevant Portfolio Holder Submitted by Councillor Noordad Aziz on behalf of Rubina Kauser

“What can the Leader of the Council do about the state of the roads in Great Harwood and Hyndburn as they are just deteriorating with my car requiring constant repair?”

Response: The Leader indicated that for most councillors in Hyndburn the biggest area of case work was around potholes on the highway and other road related issues. Councillors were frequently asked why Lancashire County Council was not repairing them.

The County Council had millions of pounds available for highways works. Councillor Dad pondered why the roads were worse now than at any other time previously? He called upon the controlling Reform group to act to repair the roads. The Government had provided an extra £20m to Lancashire County Council, making some £64m available in total for highways maintenance. That Council had also raised its Council Tax for 2026/27. Reform claimed to be improving roads, however repairs were not being carried out and lack of illumination on the M65 from Blackburn to Colne was also a concern. In short, Lancashire’s roads were deteriorating. The Leader undertook to send a letter to the County Council setting out this Council’s views.

370 Draft Pay Policy 2026/27

Members considered a report of Councillor Vanessa Alexander, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Council Operations, which presented a draft Pay Policy for 2026/27.

Councillor Alexander provided a brief introduction to the policy, which was a statutory requirement and provided a transparent approach to the setting of the pay of the Council’s employees.

The report noted that the Localism Act 2011 (Chapter 8 - Pay Accountability) required all local authorities to set out their position on a range of issues relating to the remuneration of their employees. The Policy had to be approved by the Council in open forum, by the end of March each year and then be published on its website.

The Pay Policy set out the existing approach to the remuneration of all posts within the Council. In particular, it specified certain mandatory requirements that had to be detailed within the Policy, as follows:

- The pay structure of the Council and how it was set;
- Senior Management Remuneration, providing details of the pay grade for posts defined as Chief Officer and the accompanying allowances;
- The recruitment arrangements for a Chief Officer;
- The relationship between the salaries of Chief Officers and other employees;
- Details of the lowest paid posts within the Council;
- Employer’s Pension Contribution details; and
- Termination of employment payments.

The Council already published pay and remuneration details of its senior managers on its website, within the annual Statement of Accounts.

The purpose of the Pay Policy was to ensure there was transparency as to how pay and remuneration was set by the Council, for all of its employees and particularly for its most senior level posts.

Resolved - **That the Pay Policy be agreed and published on the Council’s website.**

371 Minutes of Cabinet

The minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 21st January and 18th February 2026 were submitted.

Resolved - **That the Minutes be received and noted.**

372 Minutes of Committees

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

Meeting (Municipal Year 2025/26)	Date
Special Scrutiny Committee	18 th November 2025
Communities and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee	1 st December 2025
Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee	10 th December 2025
Planning Committee	11 th February 2026
Audit Committee	16 th February 2026
Planning Committee	11 th March 2026

In respect of Minute 256 of the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10th December 2026, Councillor Paul Cox commented that he and Councillor Andrew Clegg had asked when Milnshaw ward would be brought within the scope of an Article 4 direction. He was very pleased to see that this decision had now been implemented and thanked members of the Cabinet for their positive action.

The Leader thanked Councillor Cox for highlighting this matter and reminded members that 12 months ago an Article 4 direction had been agreed for 9 wards, to be implemented after a twelve months lead in period. At that time the controlling group had promised to review the case for extending Article 4 to other wards in the Borough. The Cabinet had kept this promise and had introduced an immediate Article 4 Direction at its last meeting on 18th March 2026.

In respect of Minute 337 of the Planning Committee on 11th March 2026, Councillor Dave Parkins apologised that he had not been able to attend that meeting due to his admission to hospital.

In respect of Minute 340 of the Planning Committee on 11th March 2026, Councillor Zak Khan commented that he had spoken against the application for a housing development on land off Blackburn Road, Oswaldtwistle. The Committee had subsequently decided to refuse that application, contrary to the officer recommendations. He noted that comments made after the meeting had levelled a criticism that his objection might have adverse financial consequences for the Council. Councillor Khan was of the view that this case illustrated that councillors had the ultimate responsibility locally for determining planning applications.

The Leader endorsed the above view that councillors made the final decision. However, he acknowledged that officers had a duty to outline potential risks, which they did by means of written recommendations. Councillors were elected and had a mandate to take decisions as appropriate, which included listening to the views of residents. The Planning Committee exercised its responsibilities based upon the evidence presented and was non-political in its approach.

Resolved - **That the Minutes be received and noted.**

373 Motion(s) submitted on Notice

No eligible Motions had been received on this occasion.

The Mayor asked members to remain seated, as he would proceed directly to the Special Meeting of the Council, which would follow immediately on the rising of this meeting.

Signed:.....

Date:

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed