

NSS welcomes Lancashire decision on non-stunned meat in schools

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The National Secular Society has welcomed a vote from councillors in Lancashire which has ratified its decision to stop supplying most non-stunned halal meat to schools.

The council passed a motion to stop the supply of non-stunned non-poultry meat at a meeting on Thursday afternoon with 49 votes in favour, 23 against and nine abstentions.

The council originally [took](#) the decision in October 2017, but has continued the supply in the interim as it [undertook](#) a lengthy consultation process.

The council's leader, Geoff Driver, [said](#) this week he had referred the matter back for another vote after "further consideration to the strength of feeling on both sides".

Lancashire County Council currently supplies non-stunned halal meat to 27 schools with a total of 12,000 pupils.

The NSS urged councillors to stop the supply of non-stun meat throughout the process, including by [writing](#) to them about it this week.

And on Thursday the NSS [revealed](#) that at least 18 councils across the UK (including Lancashire) were supplying non-stunned meat to schools. A number of councils have explicitly ruled out the supply of non-stun meat on animal welfare grounds.

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans welcomed the vote in Lancashire.

"Lancashire is quite right to consider the animal welfare issues surrounding the supply of halal meat. The consensus is clear that it is more humane to stun an animal prior to slaughter than not to do so, and insisting on this standard in catering contracts is the ethical thing to do.

"It would have been hugely disappointing to see an ethical catering policy abandoned because of special pleading from religious hardliners. Where schools serve halal meat it will be pre-stunned. This should be a much more acceptable position for anyone who believes in keeping religious fundamentalism out of our schools.

"Now the government needs to make it easier for councils to resist this pressure by [repealing](#) the religious exemption to the animal welfare laws."

The vote in Lancashire was an unwhipped free vote, although the ruling Conservative party provided the bulk of support for the motion. During the debate beforehand several councillors said the issue was a straightforward question of animal welfare.

Conservative councillor Andrew Snowden criticised the nature of the debate, saying he said he had been accused of 'Islamophobia' by Labour councillors for standing up for animal welfare.

He said such accusations demeaned the seriousness of the word and he would not be cowed by character assassinations, insults and attempt to intimidate him.

Green party councillor Gina Dowding said she would vote against the motion, arguing that passing it could cause "community disharmony and worse".

Driver said the council would work with Muslim groups to mitigate against any "unwarranted consequences" of the decision.

In 2012 the council briefly [stopped serving](#) meat which had not been stunned in its schools after it changed supplier. On that occasion Lancashire Council of Mosques (LCM) asked all Muslim families to boycott Lancashire school meals completely, not only those affected by the ban of halal un-stunned meat.

LCM campaigned vigorously against the council's latest decision.

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