

## **REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM 2019/21**

Responding to Coronavirus has dominated our council's work since last March and I remain grateful and proud of work done across our district to support residents, local businesses, and organisations. Our council responded swiftly and our residents and many organisations across the district did not hesitate in offering support to each other.

Within days the council had re-focused on three simple, but powerful themes - support residents, support local businesses, continue to deliver vital services. Officers agreed to take on new roles, learn new skills and work new hours to support our district. The flexibility shown by our officers was outstanding and highlighted how important it was to have kept services in house, as we avoided some of the struggles other councils found in a lack of flexibility in outsourced services and a smaller workforce to redeploy.

Some key numbers help illustrate the work done to support the district:

- the council's community hub called and/or visited nearly 30 000 potentially vulnerable residents
- we made an accommodation offer to every rough sleeper in the district, and along with community and health partners are providing ongoing support
- working with local food banks, food clubs and their many volunteers and supporters we provided approximately 10 000 households with food
- distributed over £50 million in grants to local businesses, social enterprises, and charities

The pandemic required the city council to focus on its role as a convening body. Building on the foundations of work begun to strengthen the council's community engagement, we began gathering the individuals and organisations across the district who were responding to the pandemic to share information and to support each other. At the height of the pandemic these groups had become so large that there were several meetings each week, each hosted by a different cabinet member.

The partnership working demonstrated by the pandemic will stand us in good stead for the work the city council needs to support in the years to come - a recovery from the pandemic that continues to strengthen the power demonstrated by our communities, improve wellbeing and decrease inequality, build community wealth and address the climate emergency. Although much of this work has been delayed by COVID, it is important to recognise that progress has been made where possible and this work is reflected in other reports.

None of these vital goals can be met by the council working alone, all can be met working in partnership. I have my fingers crossed that these partnerships will be enlarged to encompass the Bay through a unitary council, because as communities entwined with each other it makes sense to address these together.

It has been an immense privilege to serve as Leader of Lancaster City Council over the last two years. It has also been a time of great learning as a new city councillor and new cabinet member. I offer my thanks to the officers and councillors both within Lancaster City Council and across the local government family who have offered support and guidance. I look forward to the work to come.

**Councillor Dr Eric Lewis**  
**Leader of the Council 2019/2021**