

## **Annual Report of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services 2022 – 2023**

Welcome to the Annual Report for the Corporate Service portfolio April 2023. We have been asked to keep these reports brief and as such I have chosen to focus on only a few key areas within the portfolio, namely: Voter ID; Customer Services & Community Connectors; Equalities & Social Justice; Fair Work Charter; and Plan 2030. This is not to indicate that other areas are any less important but reflect an effort to balance what members and the public are most keen to hear about and some main achievements over the past year.

### **Voter ID**

As you know the government passed its Elections Act 2022 with a new requirement of Voter ID for elections. Voter ID implementation for our local elections has been particularly demanding and time consuming on the Elections Team. I'm sure there will be some difficult times ahead for our residents attempting to vote and our staff acting as polling officials in dealing with the changes imposed on us from central government.

### **Customer and Advice Services, Community Hubs and Community Connectors**

I have provided monthly reports to Cabinet members and Group Leaders on the work of Customer Services and the Community Hub. As we emerged from the pandemic and re-opened face-to-face contact, we sought to balance the needs of our residents against the increasing costs of delivery. Both Town halls are open: 9 am to 1 pm, Monday to Friday, and we have outreach community hubs twice a month in each of St Nic's arcade Lancaster and the Arndale Centre Morecambe. For extremely vulnerable residents we also offer a home visit service for those residents unable to make contact in-person or digitally.

### **Community Connectors work**

- £450,000 of funding allocated to deliver the Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF) distributed to providers in communities across the district. Over 2000 children attended HAF-funded places at 16 providers. 4,800 packed lunches were delivered to children on the programme.
- The Play and Skills at Tea-time Activities (PASTA) programme worked with three schools with the highest number of children on free school meals. A partnership with Lancaster & Morecambe College was established to provide cooking skills for families.
- Over 3000 attendances were logged at the summer playschemes during July and August. Children living in an area of deprivation benefited from this provision across Lancaster, Morecambe, Heysham and Carnforth.
- Residents engaged with surveys and consultations on Keep Connected to share their views on matters important to them. The website received over 14,000 online visits.
- A Cost of Living Crisis microsite was launched, listing over 30 free warm hubs across the district as well as information provided on energy and funding.
- Research about food banks and food clubs to inform local supply strategy and spend of Household Support Fund 4 was submitted for a report.
- Over 40 resident community meetings and events were attended, supported or organised. This included working with County Council and Lancaster ICC to deliver four school health festivals for primary-age children in Lancaster.
- A strong link was established with the DWP so that the Community Connectors were present at events organised by Lancaster and Morecambe Jobcentres.
- Funding advice was shared with groups, clubs and organisations such as Morecambe Riso Press, Unique Kidz, Lancaster Chess Club, Warton Cricket Club and many more
- Individuals and small groups regularly received support through outreach work in locations such as Skerton Community Centre and Stanleys Community Centre.

- Community Connectors supported a weekly Ukraine Support Hub at the Gregson Centre, which ran through summer, autumn and winter. In addition, events for families were held at Halloween and Christmas.
- The Armed Forces Covenant was upheld with meetings organised at Alexandra Barracks and a special health and wellbeing-focused meeting facilitated at Salt Ayre. An article to promote Lancaster to veterans was submitted to the Lancashire Armed Forces Covenant Guide.
- The Communities Together Group were supported to run their ninth Festival of Culture. Over 500 guests attended and enjoyed a free meal. A strong link was established with Lancaster University that enabled other funding streams.
- The Lancaster District Community Alcohol Partnership ran five sessions with local businesses and organisations to address the reduction of alcohol consumption in young people. Two local high schools had the SMASHED tour, and six local professionals from the police and voluntary sector took part in training with the Alcohol Education Trust.
- Morecambe Bay Academy was supported with pupil mentoring and careers, including linking pupils to advice from within the council. County Council and Lancaster ICC were supported with engaging 8 primary schools to sign up to the Walk the World initiative.
- Representatives from the VCSE sector were invited to engage in research to promote partnership work and UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- A Kickstarter joined the team for six months and left with employment at Lancashire County Council as a youth worker.

## **Customer Services**

- Administering the Household Support Grant: (rounds 2 and 3) £1,295,000 of funding has supported nearly 3,000 households in our district with food and other essentials such as utilities, household appliances and other household essentials.
- Administering the Discretionary Energy Rebate Scheme - £299,700 of funding.
- Bespoke Mobile Service: We continue to provide this service to our most in need residents, visiting them in their homes if they require tailored one to one support. Over £45,000 of income has been generated.
- A comprehensive training plan has been implemented to ensure that all core Customer Service staff are fully cross trained and able to support residents at first point of contact, ensuring resilience and flexibility across the team.
- Granicus project is continuing to be rolled out to support with our Digital First Approach. By increasing our online traffic this ensures the resources we have available to us can be used to support our most in need residents who need more intensive support on the phone or face to face.
- Successes this year include:
  - Over 80% of residents signing up for Garden Waste online, an increase on last year.
  - My Account has been launched.
  - New forms for Taxi drivers to book and make appointments online.
  - New internal forms to report accidents and hazards.
- Over 2000 calls a week are received into Customer Services
- Residents continue to receive a response to their emails within a 24-hour timeframe. Over 500 emails a week are received into Customer Services.
- Town Halls are open to the public 9am -1pm Monday to Friday seeing on average 300 customers a week between the 2 sites. Since January 2023 this has increased to 350 customers a week.
- Launch of Video Appointments: A service for residents to engage with a Customer Service advisor live on MS Teams.
- Customer Services have supported other teams across the council attending outreach days with Council Housing as well as being involved with the annual health festival.

## **Equalities & Social Justice**

Armed Forces Covenant gold status achieved in 2022. Thanks to Cllr Roger Dennison, our Armed Forces Champion who maintained our focus to achieving gold status and his ongoing commitment to Armed Forces personnel, veterans and their families across our District. This is an example of best practice which we will encourage other employers in the District to also adopt as part of both our ongoing commitment to the covenant and the Fair Work Charter.

Improved disability access signage at the Town Halls. Special thanks to Cllr Mel Guilding our Disabilities Champion who has brought matters of concern to my attention. I hope that I have been responsive to these requests.

## **Introduction of Disability Passports**

A new Disability Passport Scheme launched in January 2023 to assist disabled Council staff in talking about their disability with their managers and what could be put in place to help them to thrive at work. The disability passport is voluntary to complete. The purpose of the passport is to provide a framework document which employees can take with them throughout their career journey, hence the term 'passport', to different roles within the Council and, as more employers recognise the passport, to other employment in the future. This is an example of best practice which we will encourage other employers in the District to also adopt as part of the Fair Work Charter.

## **Fair Work Charter**

Approved by Cabinet in January 2023 and by Personnel Committee in March – committing to our own 'Fair Work' journey, Lancaster district now has a Fair Work Charter. This is the first of its kind in Lancashire. Although similar charters have been operating in Manchester, Liverpool and West Yorkshire for a few years.

The concept of the introduction of a Fair Work Charter was agreed as part of the council's commitment to Plan 2030 in December 2021. Fair Work sits as one of the pillars of Community Wealth Building and within the overall ambition to have an inclusive and prosperous economy within the district.

The rationale of the introduction of Fair Work Charters is built on the business case that to offer decent terms and conditions of employment is equally good for business, employees and local society. The proven benefits are that good terms of employment attract high calibre staff, enhance productivity and customer experience which, in turn, all support profitability or organisational success as well as quality of life for employees. This creates increased wealth and demand for products and services within the local community.

The Fair Work Charter supports the council's priority to tackle the issues associated with low pay including health inequality, productivity, dignity and equality of opportunity. By focusing on these issues, the Charter is designed to reduce labour market inequalities in the Lancaster District helping to allow our local economy to prosper.

Thank you to our Officers involved – Clare Brown in particular – who have taken this on and developed a charter for our district.

**Plan 2030**

We continue to deliver outcomes as agreed by Council in December 2021 across all portfolios. Next steps are to further develop our plans along with the ongoing Outcomes Based Resourcing exercise and in partnership with other organisations and community groups.

**Cllr Jason Wood**  
**Cabinet Member for Corporate Services**

**April 2023**