

Lancaster City Council has been at the forefront of the national and local climate action agenda throughout 2023/24. Our incredible achievements are testament to the collaborative work of officers and Members in making net zero a priority. Some bold decision-making and exciting projects have resulted in Lancaster earning a reputation as one of the national leaders regarding climate action. In addition to those national awards mentioned in the report, the City Council has just been shortlisted for the Municipal Journal achievement awards in the category of 'Leadership in responding to the Climate Emergency' and four other Local Government Chronicle awards.

1. **Mitigating, Adapting and Responding to Climate Change – Climate Emergency UK Scorecards 2023**

In October 2023, Lancaster City Council was the top-performing district council in the country in terms of actions taken to achieve net zero. Climate Emergency UK (CEUK) recognised our work across all council services to meet the challenges of the climate emergency. The scorecards independently assessed seven areas impacting carbon emissions and biodiversity loss: buildings and heating; transport; governance and finance; planning; biodiversity; collaboration and engagement; waste reduction and food. CEUK's findings were audited to ensure scorecards were fairly and robustly marked.

2. **Climate Action – Energy Efficiency Standards**

Responding to the Planning Inspector's decision regarding City Council's Climate Emergency Local Plan Review (CELPR), officers and Members spent much of 2023 challenging the Inspector's conclusions regarding the setting of energy efficiency standards for new housing.

Our officers have appeared at several national events, have worked with other local authorities and MPs across the country, pushing for higher energy efficiency standards to be a cornerstone of national housing policy. Significantly, Lancaster featured in the Channel Four documentary *The Great Climate Fight* in Autumn 2023. The response to the programme was overwhelmingly positive, and shortly afterwards Government withdrew the 2015 Written Ministerial Statement (which had been fundamental to the Inspector's previous conclusions). A new Written Ministerial Statement was published, and whilst this is still not as proactive as it should be, it has allowed the Inspector to reconsider the City Council's issue and accept in principle, subject to consultation, Lancaster's proposed higher energy efficiency standards.

This achievement is not to be underestimated. Our officers' efforts in fighting for better will no doubt have influenced other councils to do the same. Unchallenged, it would have led to a poorer quality of housing in the Lancaster District compared to some other local authority areas, and it would have had a direct impact upon fuel poverty and health inequality in the district. This challenge has also led to one of our Principal Planning Officers being recognised by *The Planner Magazine* as one of this year's 'Women of Influence' in the UK.

3. **Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP)**

The Council procured consultants Energy Catapult Systems (funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund) to produce a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) for the district.

The LAEP will identify the most cost-effective pathway for our district to reach net zero, whilst also realising associated local co-benefits such as jobs and skills development. It addresses electricity generation, heat and gas networks, potential for hydrogen, the built environment (i.e. domestic, commercial and industrial), energy storage, decarbonisation of transport, and charging infrastructure. The LAEP project will be concluded in summer 2024.

4. **Renewable Energy Generation**

The City Council's planning application (23/01383/FUL) for the construction of a solar farm and associated infrastructure (substations, cables, CCTV and security fencing) at Burrow Beck, Lancaster will be considered by the Planning Regulatory Committee in due course.

5. **Funding bids for Buildings Decarbonisation and Climate Strategy**
The Council has recently been successful in its bid for Phase 3c funding of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS), which was managed by Salix on behalf of the Government's Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. The grant of approximately £1.9m, will be used to decarbonise further council-owned buildings and provide energy efficiency measures (Williamson Park, CityLab and The Storey). Almost £10m of funding has now been secured in the last 3 years.

A successful bid to UK Shared Prosperity Fund will allow the development of an overarching District Climate and Nature Action Framework (CANAF) This will bring all climate action activities together under a single, high-level framework/strategy, fund further public climate engagement and technical-economic modelling of projects identified by the LAEP.

6. **Monitoring Energy Usage: Show and Tell**
The Council's previous award-winning efforts in decarbonising some of its buildings is now paying dividends. Officers have created a new dashboard, displayed at Salt Ayre Leisure Centre and on the Council's website, with live energy data (updated every 30 minutes) from Salt Ayre and from the solar array. It also provides a monthly energy breakdown. Accumulative financial savings were £376k. The Council has also saved in excess of 1,300 tonnes of CO₂ from natural gas at Salt Ayre LC.

7. **Decarbonising our own Transport Emissions**
The Co-Wheels Car Pool Scheme has provided staff with access to 14 electric vehicles during 2023/2024, used by over 78 members of staff, for around 54k miles, saving the Council over £24,000 in mileage claims (based on 45p per mile). In total, 9.91 tonnes of CO₂ have been saved by utilising using electric pool vehicles. The Car Pool provides public access to our vehicles, particularly at weekends, with over 19,000 miles over the course of the year.

8. **Biodiversity Net Gain**
The Council's feasibility study, involving multiple services, for Council-owned sites to support BNG, will be published in April 2024. This year Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) became a national mandatory requirement for development. Developers who cannot secure the necessary 'biodiversity unit' shortfall on their own site may instead secure an alternative site for local net gain. BNG units will be sold on the open market. There is currently a wide range of predicted values for a single BNG unit, but a low estimate is around £20,000. Under the Environment Act 2021 habitat bank landowners enter into a legal agreement that is binding for 30 years. In response to this, the Council is exploring how it could use its own land for habitat banking (other landowners are already offering this). The cost of establishing and managing the new habitats over the 30 year period will need to be offset against the sale of BNG units.

So far, the Council's study, informed by the Grassland Management Strategy, has identified 11 sites ranging in size from 0.5ha to 3.5ha. The larger sites could potentially provide 20 BNG units. Land east off Middleton Road, between Heysham and Middleton Village (1.39ha) has been selected as a preferred pilot site. A Management Plan has been prepared, which may deliver 11 BNG units through transforming the current scrub and grassland to wildflower meadow, with opportunities for wetland improvement, which would become accessible to the public.

9. **Community Engagement**
The Climate Team has run a grant funded climate engagement project on active and sustainable travel which concluded this year, as well as continuing engagement around the climate emergency at a wide range of events and venues.

The Local Climate Engagement Programme (run by Involve; UK100; the Democratic Society; Shared Future CIC and Climate Outreach) provided funding for training and delivering a series of public engagement projects around the theme of 'What is needed for the residents of Lancaster District to move to more active and sustainable travel'. The programme built on the work of the People's Jury from 2020 with Jury members becoming actively involved. Officers ran three engagement strands: Pol.is which had 524 participants engaging in an online platform; Training Community Explorers who then collected 135 in depth interviews; and deliberative workshops with the People's Jury which delivered 21 Ideas for Action. The report is imminent.

10. Looking Ahead

By this time next year, the Climate Emergency Local Plan Review will be complete; the Local Area Energy Plan will have identified the most cost-effective pathway to net zero; Burrow Beck Solar Farm planning application will be known, alongside the business plan, and if successful work will started; and the impact of work resulting from successful funding bids listed in this report will be felt.

Lancaster City Council aims to maintain and enhance its position as a trusted and innovative local authority in tackling the climate emergency.

Councillor Gina Dowding
Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Climate Action
April 2024

Portfolio Holder Annual Report 2023-24 – Wellbeing, Communities and Partnerships

Portfolio Holder – Cllr Peter Jackson

I hold a wide-ranging portfolio which touches on many areas of interest and concern.

SALT AYRE LEISURE CENTRE

In social value and financial scale, this is the largest responsibility in the portfolio. SALC is an exceptional facility of which we should be extremely proud. It delivers services to about 1 million visitors per year, including school swimming lessons, hosting indoor and outdoor sports clubs, sessions for SEN children and for adults with additional needs, healthy weight services, services for Community Midwives, Holiday Activities and Food programme. There is a (new) link to the centre on the landing page of the City Council's website, I recommend browsing the different links to the Centre's services to see the breadth and quality of what we offer.

In the current financial climate officers and the portfolio holder have been strongly focussed on reducing the level of subsidy that SALC needs. In January the monthly cost of Gym membership was increased from £34 to £40 (for comparison, 3-1-5 gym charges £65). The effect of this change has been a short-term drop in membership from 3700 to 3500. However, even at this level the financial impact is likely to be an increase in revenue of over £125,000. A membership drive to recruit new members is in place.

Even with the benefit of power from our solar farm, increased electricity costs have impacted the balance sheet. Electricity use is monitored in detail by our team, and falling costs are beginning to have a positive impact. Further ways of reducing these costs are being explored.

UKSPF and REPF

Applications to the UKSPF and its rural counterpart, the REPF, have greatly exceeded the level of available funding. The process we follow to allocate funds involves assessment of applications by officers and by an external assessment team (Growth Lancashire). This is then followed by careful and detailed consideration by cabinet, leading to funding decisions which are in line with previously set targeted areas for intervention. All decisions for funding in the 2024-25 financial year have now been made, and officers are working with grant recipients to confirm details. This funding has been of great value to our district, and the loss of it for future years, when it is being centralised to the new CCA (Combined County Authority) under a process called "devolution", is greatly to be regretted. Perhaps the CCA could be persuaded to devolve it back to us?

Yorkshire Dales National Park

Since the park was extended in August 2016 it now includes the most northern part of our district, the villages of Ireby, Leck and Cowan Bridge. As a result, we appoint one member to the National Park authority, and I have held this role this year. I attended full authority meetings (quarterly) and served on the Finance and Resources committee. The YDNPA is the planning authority in the park, and I also twice attended its planning committee to substitute for other members.

COMMUNITY CONNECTORS

Our Community Connectors team works with organisations across the district, often at a grassroots level. This report cannot cover all the varied work of the connectors, but some highlights are given below:

HAF (Holiday activities and food) 2500 children attended events delivered by 20 providers. 4 events within this programme were held, supported by Lancs Fire and Rescue, SALC, LDCVS, L&M College, NHS and the Police.

PASTA – Play and Skills at Tea-time ran at 4 primary schools: St.Lukes, Sandylands, Ryelands and West End. L&M College provided training in cooking skills.

Summer playschemes attracted over 1500 children.

The connectors offered funding advice to a range of organisations, as varied as Warton Cricket Club, Unique Kidz and Morecambe Riso Press, and many more, often resulting in successful funding bids. The connectors sit on the funding panel of the Walney fund, over £650k of funding delivered for our district.

The Community Connectors facilitate “Communities Together” where varied ethnic and faith groups meet. They held a very successful Festival of Culture based at Lancaster University.

Community connectors were involved also with International Women’s Day, Disability Access Rights, The Armed Forces Covenant, Ryelands Residents Group and are involved in the work of our strong local network of Food clubs and Food banks.

PARTNERSHIPS

I attend meetings of several groups which seek to coordinate activity in our district.

ICC – Integrated Care Community is a group where health bodies share information about their services. This helps each group to know where to refer patients for their specific issues and simplify the healthcare process. Council is developing an overview of our wellbeing offer which could be made available through this group.

H&WBP – Health and Wellbeing Partnership.

A mixture of a wide range of public service and voluntary sector bodies which has set three priorities for its ongoing work.

Adults – focus on Cardiovascular, COPD and Mental Health

Children and Young People with a focus on prevention of health issues through early intervention.

Communities – building community resilience.

Priority wards, the six wards which produce the most presentations at A+E, have been identified.

CSP – Community Safety Partnership

The partnership looks at specific areas of crime including serious violence and anti-social behaviour. Thorough statistics are provided by the Police statistician, and educational, health, fire and rescue representatives, as well as City and County Councils, contribute to considering measures to improve outcomes. As an example, the partnership was able to fund closed circuit cameras on the Lancaster to Morecambe cycle path and at Salt Ayre to cut crime and ASB in those areas.

LDFJP – Lancaster District Food Justice partnership

This group coordinates much of the activity of the voluntary sector in supporting those in food poverty. We have a strong group of dedicated organisations working in this area, supported by the expertise of LDCVS (Lancaster District Community Voluntary Solutions) who help with

fundraising and organisational support. The partnership works to minimise food waste and make surplus food available, through food clubs and food banks, to those who need it.

And there's more.

I have also contributed to workshops developing our LAEP (local Area Energy Plan), meetings of the Lancaster District Strategic Partnership, Healthy Weight initiative meetings, and the Frontierland Project board of 6 cabinet members.

Household Support Fund

Council uses this government fund to support residents who present with issues of debt, fuel poverty, food poverty and are struggling with everyday life issues. The fund can offer grants for the purchase of white goods, food bank vouchers, and refers, where appropriate, people to Citizen's Advice for debt counselling and benefits advice. It represents a good example of cooperation between Council and our voluntary sector. Funding has been continued by government for the first 6 months of the new financial year.

Peter Jackson 15.04.2024

Corporate Services portfolio – Annual Report April 2024

Cllr Jason Wood

1. Introduction

Welcome to the Annual Report for the Corporate Services portfolio April 2024. This portfolio includes responsibilities for:

- Facilities Management (Operational),
- Legal Services,
- Democratic Services (Democratic Support, Civic, Mayoral & Elections),
- Customer and Advice Services,
- Governance,
- Fair Work Charter, Equalities and Social Justice, and
- Human Resources

Like all Cabinet members, each of us have been involved in the Outcomes Based Resourcing (OBR) process which involved an intensive period of meetings and deliberations from October 2023 to February 2024 to deliver the Budget which Council approved. OBR/Fit-for-the-Future work for future budgets is getting underway from now. However, the focus of this report is the work in Corporate Services over the previous year.

2. Facilities Management (FM) – Operational

2.1 Office Buildings

- Prepared Palatine Hall for a commercial letting, included relocation of all staff, furniture and storage.
- Office relocations delivered for Cemeteries, Public Realm, Assets and Compliance, Legal and Housing Customer services.
- All facilities requirements arranged for White Lund Depot temporary Portakabin office solutions, including desk, welfare and storage provision, as well as scheduling of relocation and ICT requirements.
- Interior redecoration works completed to x5 office spaces.
- 15,141kg estimated carbon saving to date for office refits and staff relocations since the pandemic, due to purchase of quality used office furniture for all projects.
- 65 statutory checks each week across 13 buildings including fire alarms testing,

legionella flushing, firefighting equipment and escape route checks.

- Assumed responsibility for CityLab reception function, a key supporting element of the council's wider focus on compliance activity across the property portfolio.
- Delivered a c£120K revenue saving in Building Cleaning through restructure and scheduling efficiencies.
- 16,679sq/m cleaned each day across corporate and commercial properties, supporting core council administration and income generation through events and commercial tenancies.

2.2 Events

- £8,500 income generated from venue hire facilitating filming of Robin and the Hood, sky movies production.
- Remembrance Sunday, Staff Conference, Christmas Quiz and Annual Council all successfully delivered.
- MTH Livestream solution – FM led project completed in June 23. FM worked with key stakeholders in ICT and Democratic Services to deliver £140,000 (government funded) live streaming solution for MTH Council Chamber.

3. Legal Services

- The team supports the good governance of the Council, providing legal and procedural advice to Services in their operational activities, and to officers and members in the decision-making process.
- Involved with projects undertaken by officers in all services in the Council and played key roles in contract drafting and negotiation; and providing advice on strategy, risk and statutory compliance.
- Eden project administration around new Subsidy Control (previously State Aid) legislation. Report produced for submission to the new Subsidy Advice Unit at the Competitive Markets Authority to evidence compliance with the new legislation. Learning curve for City Council as an accountable body to absorb the requirements of a new regime and provide the most robust report possible to be

assessed by SAU. We are delighted with the outcome of the referral and in achieving this milestone.

- The Procurement function has recently moved from Finance to Legal Services and a full review of processes and procedures is scheduled to take place as well as making arrangements for the implementation of new legislation in this area.
- In supporting other services of the Council, Legal Services have undertaken successful prosecutions for Food Hygiene and planning matters.
- Recently appointed a Housing and Anti-Social Behaviour solicitor with a focus on litigation and regulatory compliance in the sector.
- The day-to-day legal work incorporating debt collection, rating cases, recovery of rent arrears, council house sales and other property transactions, including sales and leases, has continued, as has the provision of a local land charges service, and the licensing and information governance functions.

4. Democratic Services (Democratic Support, Civic, Mayoral & Elections)

4.1 Civic

A full programme of Mayoral and Civic Events has taken place as usual supported by the team. Please refer to the Mayor's annual report for more detail.

4.2 Democratic Support

- Livestreaming of Council meetings using new equipment has had a few teething problems and delays to introducing e-voting, but now all seems to be working well. 44 people viewed the February meeting remotely for budget setting. Only 8 people viewed the March meeting remotely, so, just like attendance in person, the items on the agenda attract different audiences and we would expect the Budget to be of great interest to many residents.
- New Councillors induction programme took place following the May 2023 elections and a survey of Councillors views about that and other services provided by Democratic Support was sent out. Results will be circulated to help the team formulate a plan for future training and the induction in 2027. Already there are plans to use filmed clips to explain procedures and how to find your way around the two Town Halls, as these

may be more popular than the documentation that is currently sent out.

4.3 Elections

- The Elections Act 2022 not only introduced the Photo ID requirement to vote in a polling station – which came into effect last year, it contained a number of challenging new requirements to be implemented by the elections team in 2023/24, including changes to postal and proxy voting and to overseas voters.
- Following the May 2024 PCC election, we anticipate a General Election in the autumn and an additional challenge will be the new boundaries.
- Mark Davies, our Chief Executive, remains the Returning Officer for two constituencies, but the areas covered have changed. In the new Lancaster & Wyre constituency takes in additional wards from Wyre. In Morecambe & Lunesdale will be taking in wards from Westmorland and Furness for the first time. We have worked with Wyre many times on general elections but will partner with Westmorland and Furness for the first time. Working together in this way takes close communication, meticulous planning and preparation and the development of protocols. All this work has been underway for some time.
- The team have moved to new offices in the basement of Lancaster Town Hall which are more easily accessible for deliveries and can house all their equipment, such as ballot boxes, polling screens, counting trays, Polling Office sundries, etc all in one place rather than being scattered across several locations in the building. This has created a much more cohesive and secure working environment which is fit for the future, with space to fill ballot boxes in situ instead of taking out the Ashton Hall for days for that purpose.

5. Customer and Advice Services

- Administered the Household Support Grant: (round 4) £1.2m of funding has supported over 4,000 households in our district with food and other essentials such as utilities, household appliances and other household essentials.
- Administered the UKSPF funded project in partnership with Home Improvement Agency, through this we have awarded 30

households with essential energy efficient white goods and heaters.

- 1500 households received a leaflet detailing top energy saving tips to assist with keeping utility costs affordable. Leaflets have also been provided to key partners: Lancaster District Food Justice Partnership, Greenrose and Citizens Advice to provide to households who need this support.
- TCA funding has been used to provide support to 875 of local schools deprived families comprised of 967 children at primary school age, 341 at high school age to provide a family day at Salt Ayre Leisure Centre to take part in 2 activities and have a meal free of charge.
- Granicus project continues to be developed 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.
 - Self-service across all online services has risen from 48% to 82% over the last year.
 - New Complaints process form has been developed and due to launch April 24
 - New request forms created to request a food hygiene re-inspection, appeal food hygiene rating and request removal of wasps.
- Increased availability of digital services and other improvements to service delivery have reduced demand for our phone lines from over 2,000 calls a week to an average of 1,750.
- Customer Services has been shortlisted for a 'Digital Impact' award at the 2024 Local Government Awards
- Introduction of a new online 'Contact Us' form triages queries direct to services throughout the council. All queries sent to Customer Services receive a 24hr response.
- Town Halls are open to the public 9am – 1pm Monday to Friday seeing on average 350 customers a week between Morecambe and Lancaster Town Hall. These venues are

due to increase their opening hours from Monday 15th April, 9am – 4:30pm.

6. Governance

- This council's Constitution, sets out how the council conducts its business, including who is responsible for making decisions and how decisions are made.
- Most decisions are capable of challenge by way of an appeal mechanism and, failing that, judicial review. However no public body wants to bear the expense and uncertainty of challenges in courts and tribunals. More importantly, we want to make sure that we get our processes right, so we can make robust and lasting decisions.
- The Monitoring Officer will monitor and review the operation of the Constitution on a regular basis, in order to ensure that it is up-to-date and is empowered to make changes to ensure that:
 - (a) legislative references are updated;
 - (b) it reflects the Council's structures and decision-making requirements;
 - (c) consequential amendments are made as a result of Council decisions; and
 - (d) any other required changes are made as appropriate.

7. Fair Work Charter, Equalities and Social Justice

Responsibly for Fair Work Charter implementation has moved from policy to Sustainable Growth and continues to be rolled out.

Much of 2023 was about getting our own house in order with Living Wage Foundation accreditation an important step before asking other employers in the district to do the same.

Significant work has progressed on our own internal Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion policies and practices to be in a better position to provide advice and guidance to other employers on how they can improve their practices.

8. Human Resources

- 8.1 HR policies, strategies and programmes
- HR dashboard developed and phase two of HR Policy review complete

- People Plan co-created and launched
- Learning and Development Strategy launched with supporting training
- Lancaster People Manager Essentials Programme launched, comprising of HR workshops on key topics for all managers, Institute of Leadership & Management programmes at Levels 3 and 5, e-learning packages, Aspiring Leaders programme in partnership with Lancaster and Morecambe College, manager network, top leadership team development
- Wellbeing Strategy with a suite of trained Mental Health First Aiders
- Engagement Strategy with supporting Staff Conferences and Staff Ambassadors (staff network)
- Overhaul of recruitment process to create a seamless and digital first for applicants
- Refresh of values, co-created with employees and cross referenced with Council plan
- Performance Management Framework, including Annual Conversations as an updated version of a performance appraisal
- Employee benefits platform introduced with employee assistance programme

8.2 OBR and Restructures

Through the OBR proposals 43 employees were identified as potentially at risk of redundancy.

Following consultations and the organisational change process, in total 33 employees received Voluntary Redundancy in 2023. The number of redundancies was less than first anticipated, contributing factors include counter proposals and redeployments.

There were no compulsory redundancies.

8.3 External achievements and awards

- Investors In People (IIP) established Silver status achieved

Investors in People is the international standard for people management, defining what it takes to lead, support and manage people effectively.

It enables organisations to benchmark themselves against the best in the business. Silver is a fantastic achievement and something that only 15% of organisations assessed are able to achieve.

Highlights from the IIP report include:

- The council's new organisational structure, where Chief Officers have more collective responsibility and accountability, is more agile, improves opportunities for collaboration, and has strengthened systems thinking and strategic focus
- A behaviours framework supports the values and sets out clear expectations for staff and makes clear what people can expect in terms of organisational support
- A comprehensive and well-formed People Plan is aligned to the council's vision, purpose and values
- Key priorities over the next 12-18 months include a Learning and Development Strategy, leadership and management development, developing coaching and mentoring capability and continuing to support wellbeing

- Foundation (Real) Living Wage (RLW) accreditation

City council has long been a living wage paying employer – but finally received accreditation from the Foundation in 2023.

Current rate (from April 2024) is set at £12.00 per hour.

The RLW is calculated annually according to what people need to make ends meet. It provides a voluntary benchmark for employers can choose to pay to ensure their staff earn a wage that meets the costs and pressures they face in their everyday lives. It is set each year by the Living Wage Foundation and is calculated based on living costs.

Portfolio Report - Environmental Services 2023-2024

It's been a whirlwind of a year, learning to be both a Councillor and Cabinet member as well as developing an understanding of just how large the scope of the Environmental Services Portfolio is. I've lost count of the many times that I've asked the question "Is this us?" to Will and his team and the answer has been invariably "Yes, that's us".

There is an incredible amount of work being done every day by a dedicated team, it is a portfolio that touches everyone's life in the district, every single day, much of it unseen and not noticed because when it's working well, it just happens. So much so, that the smallest problem can often be magnified exponentially as it's so far from the norm. Even then the team will go out of their way to get things back on track as quickly as possible.

We can't however rest on our laurels, financial constraints and additional demands on our services are pushing us to constantly evolve. Embracing the use of data and digitalisation allows us to drive improvements across the whole service.

The following is a comprehensive review of just what we have achieved over the last year in the areas of waste & recycling, street cleansing, parks & open spaces, and public protection.

My thanks go to my predecessor for all the work he did as a portfolio holder and to the hard work, professionalism, and dedication of all the officers within the Environmental Services portfolio.

Waste & Recycling:

- Collected over 3.5 tonnes of batteries since introducing their collection in 22-23.
- Introduction of a coffee pods recycling scheme in partnership with Podback to allow residents to recycle their coffee pods at the kerbside.
- Green Waste Subscriptions equalled 22,163 for the April 23 to March 24 period.
- Lancaster District Recycling figure is 36.2% for the 2022/23 period. As ever what we can recycle is constrained by what County allows us to recycle.
- Bulky Waste Collections equated to over 283 tonnes.
- Working with County on a cradle-to-grave review of the total cost of waste in anticipation of government waste strategy, the first phase of which is expected to be in place by 31 March 2025, covering non-domestic waste streams followed by full implementation across the whole district at the end of March 2026.
- Windermere Park Morecambe 1,000 residents placed on wheelie bin recycling and optimised collection profile with a monthly collection of recycling streams and fortnightly residual.
- 240-litre recycling bins have been delivered to over 3,000 residents.
- Worked in partnership with Lancaster University to audit the successful implementation of wheelie bins in Windermere Park and to review the quality of the recycling carried out by residents as part of research undertaken with the PPIPL project team.

Street Cleansing:

- 2,884 fly-tipping incidents in the period from April 2023 to March 2024. Resulting in over 611 tonnes of waste collected, a reduction of 20% vs the previous year.
- Working in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy to develop fly-tipping process improvements including a fly-tipping strategy and action plan due May 2024.
- Working in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy and other authorities to develop a values-based comms strategy.
- Bin sensor technology is to be deployed across the district from May 24, this will improve the operational efficiency of the service through digitalisation. Sensors will be able to report the fill levels of bins, this will allow us to plan the most efficient collection route for front-line operatives.

Public Protection:

- Submission of a draft Air Quality Action Plan to Defra.
- About to revoke 2 Air Quality Management Area Orders in Carnforth and Galgate because of year-on-year reductions in NO₂ which are now falling well below government targets. In addition will be reviewing and amending the remaining AQMA in Lancaster as hourly mean levels in NO₂ now fall well below those stipulated in the current order.
- Imminently due to complete the review of the Contaminated Land Strategy in draft form which will be sent out for consultation.
- There have been 1156 interventions in respect of service requests (letters/warnings)
- 438 Visits carried out to premises/complainants.
- We have responded to 1814 service requests.
- Noise App 2 relaunched with 202 cases dealt with during the period. Members of the team were instrumental in assisting RIAMS with fine-tuning as they uncovered lots of hiccups.
- Complete overall of bodycams and software – updated and repaired fit for use
- Successfully launched online booking for pest control wasp treatments, with 43% of requests last summer being submitted and paid for via the website.
- A total of 2215 service requests were received and dealt with by the pest control team.
- The food and safety team held a food forum for local businesses to attend and receive advice and support at The Storey Lancaster. We had 64 people come to listen to presentations by the team and partner agencies.
- The team were involved in a multi-agency operation which helped disrupt an illegal food and cigarette smuggling operation from China. Seized products were brought to Heysham Port Border Control Post for processing by the Port/Food team and border force.

Friends of Parks Updates:

- Establishment of multiple new friends' groups: We now have a total of 34 active groups across the district.
- Greaves Park: Raised £10,000 for a zip wire to be installed in 2024, added a wildflower area and a tree trail map for public use.
- Ryelands Park: Replaced 28 cherry trees damaged by criminal activity, also replaced a small-leaved lime tree and held a bulb planting community day.
- Scotch Quarry: Achieved funding target of £35k for new play equipment and surfacing, installation to be completed by November 2024.
- Fairfield Community Park: Raised £66k for new play equipment and surfacing, works underway, expected to finish by the end of April 2024.
- Regent Park: Made improvements with funds of £774, including returfing goal mouths and planting a magnolia tree.
- Miss Whalley's Field: Organized volunteer events including litter picks and tree maintenance, developing an interactive map.
- Storey Gardens: Raised over £15,000 to replace artwork, collaborating with Food Futures and Closing Loops on a composting demonstration site.
- Clay Pitts Park: Installed notice board, raised planters, and planted trees, also installed picnic benches with funding from Groundworks UK.
- The Roods: Planted new trees and hedges, fundraising for new play equipment and football goals.
- Winchester Field and Nature: Utilizing S106 money for field improvements, raised funds for bridge replacement and notice board.
- Happy Mount Park: Received funding for a sensory garden, Friends group actively fundraising for an extension to the toddler play area and wheelchair-accessible facilities. This will complement the changing places (CPT) facility that opened in June 2023 providing essential facilities to a wider range of visitors to the park.
- Various parks participated in Love Parks Week and volunteer activities like balsam bashing.

District Biodiversity and AS & L Updates:

- Administration of £126,800 of grant funding through the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme, supporting landowners and land managers to deliver benefits for nature, climate, people and place. This included projects improving accessibility for trampers, providing training on carbon and regenerative farming, the development of The Growing Station wildflower nursery, historic boundary work, and delivering habitat management work.
- Grew 8363 plug plants, bolstering biodiversity throughout the National Landscape, managed local nature reserves, and facilitated over 100 volunteer tasks.
- Supported Butterfly Conservation, removed invasive species, and conducted habitat management activities.
- Engaged in community programs like Dementia Friendly Walks and Into the Woods.
- Collaborated with schools and delivered educational workshops.
- Hosted events like Woodland Fun Days and guided walks.
- Reviewed planning applications and supported local projects through grants.

- Conducted litter picks, installed waymarker posts, and organized BioBlitz and Family Fun-gi Day events.

Events:

- Over 120 events were held in the district on Council land, contributing to community well-being.

Parks & Open Space:

- 5x Green flag and 2x seaside resort awards retained for another year. Happy Mount Park received one of its highest scores to date.
- Williamson Park also retains its Green Flag Heritage Status.

Other:

- Public Realm received over 5000 service requests from residents regarding our services.
- Successful multi-agency response to supa skips incident.
- Delivery of in-cab devices to front-line operatives to improve service response and promote paperless working through digitalisation.
- Ongoing allotment review draft report due May 2024. This is a full district review looking at aspects of the service provision.
- Continuing to fund the food futures coordinator post which has supported the organisation receiving a silver award for sustainable food places.
- UKSPF/Streets are Ours (Sun Square improvement project) this is funded by year 2 UKSPF. Work is due to be completed in May 2024.

Cllr Joanne Ainscough

Cabinet Member for Environmental Services

April 2024

Annual Report 2023-24 – Finance and Resources

Portfolio Holder – Cllr Tim Hamilton-Cox

Prologue

- 1) ‘Delivering the keynote speech of the conference was Clive Betts, chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee. Betts warned that the next parliament will be “challenging”, suggesting that in the Spring Budget, announced earlier this month, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities’ (DLUHC’) spending profile did not increase, which will have “ramifications” for councils including real terms cuts.’
- 2) From the best value report in to the operation of the now defunct Northamptonshire CC after it had been the first council, in 2018, to issue a s.114 notice for nearly two decades: ‘In local government there is no substitute for doing boring really well. Only when you have a solid foundation can you innovate.’

Portfolio responsibilities are:

‘Strategic Control of Financial Resources
Treasury Management
Procurement and Fair Trade
Audit and Risk Register
Financial Services
Revenues and Benefits
Property and Assets (Commercial and Investment)
ICT’

Strategic Control of Financial Resources

It is a council-wide achievement to have responded so effectively to the very difficult budgetary situation in February 2023 and to have delivered well over 90% of budgeted savings of £2.4m in 23/24. (The value of savings increase to £3.3m in 24/25, illustrating the importance of the decisions made by the previous administration to achieve budgetary stability.) As of Q3 the council was expecting an overspend of £677k in 23/24. Given the budgeted use of reserves of £577k, this would mean a total draw on reserves of £1.254m. But that figure includes the full cost of the savings programme – ‘service transformation’ - and in any case is likely to be lower at out-turn.

The 24/25 budget includes increases in income lines and a significant forecast increase in the value of its share of business rates revenues on larger properties. Nevertheless, the deficit in 26/27 is still forecast to be £4.5m so the Outcomes-Based Resourcing process – now branded as ‘Fit for the Future’ faces significant challenge to achieve a balanced budget by then. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy presented to full council on 13th March is the councillors’ essential guide to the scale of the challenge and the assumptions being made to define it.

Treasury management

The council budgeted in Feb. '23 to borrow £15.5m externally in order to fund capital expenditure and replenish its working capital to pay for day-to-day expenditure. In practice, higher than expected grant income and a reduced capital programme has meant no new borrowing took place. The saving in interest cost will be over £1m and since not all that saving was factored in to the Q3 projection, there is another £400k-plus to reduce the year-end draw on reserves.

Optimising the use of the council's cash balances through the flow and ebb of the financial year is an under-recognised skill and it is at this point I thank Elaine, the officer in charge of this function (and of the devilishly complicated calculation of the council's share of business rates income) council as she retires in the summer. (See the prologue!)

Procurement and Fair Trade

The Council's procurement function moved to Legal Services in November 2023 following the retirement of the council's previous procurement manager. It is acknowledged that there are areas for improvement and efficiencies but progress is taking time as resources are limited to effect change whilst at the same time providing support to procurement currently underway.

The Council procurement online portal known as 'the Chest' records that in 2023/24 twenty procurements exercises were carried out. These procurement exercises include significant projects such as work on the SupaSkips site, Council Housing works and the Mellishaw Lane Traveller Site.

The requirements on local authorities are changing with the Procurement Act 2023 and it is currently anticipated that the new regulations will take effect in full in October 2024. The effects should include providing full access to public procurement data and simplifying the process of working with the public sector, thereby supporting more SMEs to bid for contracts.

On the promotion of fair trade, I defer to my colleague Cllr Abi Mills who has continued to champion the cause as the councillor link to the local Fairtrade group; and who helped to organise a 20th anniversary event in Lancaster town hall in March.

Audit and Risk Register

The chair of audit will be reporting in detail on the excellent work of both the committee and internal audit contractors, MIAA. I would merely add here that one of the sticking points hindering completion of statements of accounts going back to 2019-20 has been over the contingent liability represented by development of Luneside East. This is now unstuck thanks to a resolution with Homes England, which has taken a tremendous effort. Over to the external auditor to expedite its tasks.

From 23/24 there is a very significant increase in the cost of external audit, which all councils are bearing as it is argued that low audit fees have compromised timeliness and effectiveness.

As I see it, the regular reporting of the risk register is one of the (albeit necessary) stand-out achievements of the council over the last two years and credit is due to the officers who have made it so.

Financial Services

I may be biased but this is a great, really conscientious, team of people. But a point that I have been making is that Financial Services is the collator/rapporteur, and not the controller, of service budgets. In other words, service budget queries do need to be directed to the service in the first instance.

I'm aware of the CFO's conscious approach to succession planning and trying to 'grow our own', especially with the appointment of two graduate apprentices. Q3 shows that Financial Services expects to come in at around 8% below budget, largely because of the vacancies it is carrying.

I am also very supportive of the conscious guarding against optimism bias when Financial Services assesses projects and their business cases; first championed explicitly (at least so far as I'm aware) by a distinguished predecessor CFO.

Finally, I want to repeat a 'shout-out' for the officer (Lesley) who invigilated the relevant insurance policy and identified extra years of compensation payable for lost rent caused by the fire at the Gateway building on White Lund in 2022, resulting in an additional 6-figure payment to the council.

Revenues and Benefits

The Preston city council-hosted shared service was established in 2011 and continues to provide a highly efficient but approachable service. (My experience of Andrew, the service manager.) A notable element of the modest fee increase for 24/25, and significant cost in absolute terms, is for postage. There is going to be a concerted effort to persuade billpayers to switch to e-billing. I would ask members to set an example in this respect.

There is a move to increase use of chatbots to triage enquiries: this allows staff to focus more of their time resolving complex cases.

The KPI which is used to measure effectiveness of the service is 'Average time taken to process new Housing Benefit claims' and this returned to within target in Q3.

The other measure which members will be aware of is the collection rate for council tax. At 94.1%, the rate is below the median for a district authority. There is a particular effort in train to increase the rate but it undoubtedly faces a strong headwind from the 'Cost of Living' crisis. By contrast the business rates collection rate is above median and in terms of council income is now the larger contributor to the council's finances.

Property and Assets (Commercial and Investment)

Well done to the Property team for all their work over the past year, not least for significantly improving regulatory compliance and for starting to tackle an intimidating property maintenance task: their durability may (need to) be greater than the assets they manage.

Occupancy levels of the commercial property estate remain very good overall at 97.4% of tenanted property, down just a percentage point on a year ago.

The net income from commercial land and properties in 23/24 was budgeted at £1.625m. There will be a shortfall on that because of the impact of the fire at Gateway, White Lund; the administration of the tenant at 17-21, Penny St; and the business rates liability at Hilmore Way. In all three cases it is expected that the revenue situation will improve in 24/25. In particular, the fire damage reinstatement works at Gateway have concluded.

NHS tenants vacated Ryelands House during the year ahead of leases ending and there is community-led interest in occupying the grade II listed building.

Palatine Hall transferred from the municipal estate to the commercial estate during the year as a tenant concluded a lease arrangement for the whole building.

The stabilisation of energy costs does mean that service recharges are less of an acute problem than was anticipated 15 months ago, though gas and electricity are still significantly more expensive than two years ago.

As condition surveys across both the commercial and corporate estate are completed, it is likely that hard decisions will need to be made on the future roles of individual assets given the looming budget deficit and the need to protect core services against the financial impact of significant capital and revenue expenditure on property maintenance.

ICT operations

I've selected a few of the team's visible accomplishments over the past 12 months, provided by Joe, the ICT manager. We cannot under-estimate the role played in the background to enable so much in the council to function without a second thought. (To paraphrase the current prime minister: is there anything that doesn't involve ICT?)

The team has secured a silver award for the council's Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) data. Two years ago this data was below the national standard and the team now has ambitions for gold.¹

The team has implemented a new service desk ticketing system called 'Freshservice' that will allow ICT to become more efficient in the handling of incidents and service requests.

It has led on the implementation of interactive display screens for residents and visitors to access. Screens are in place at Williamson Park, the city's museums, The Platform, and The Storey. Lancaster Bus Station is the next location planned to receive an interactive display.

¹ LLPG is a central database that contains accurate and up-to-date address details of all the properties within Lancaster district, collated according to the national standard BS7666:2006. Functions within the council, such as planning, council tax, non-domestic rates and electoral registration, use the data. The database is also linked to the National Land and Property Gazetteer, a national address database for England and Wales that drives applications and services at a regional and national level.

Wi-Fi upgrades have been implemented at The Storey, Lancaster Town Hall, and Williamson Park. The Platform is also planned to receive an upgrade to Wi-Fi access on-site.

So in a way it's no surprise, but really gratifying, that the ICT team is a finalist in the Local Government Chronicle Awards 2024 in the category for 'Digital Impact'. The team worked closely with departments to map processes in order to use the Granicus software platform to develop a new digital reporting system. This makes it easier for residents and businesses to contact the council, report issues, and conduct transactions. This is the kind of 'channel shift' or digitalisation the council is looking to implement more widely as part of OBR.

Well done ICT; and indeed to all the other teams whose work I've pickpocketed for this annual report.

Annual Report of portfolio holder for Housing and Homelessness

This portfolio area faced multiple and excessively heavy demands over 2023/2024. Onerous government regulation, an acknowledged housing crisis and legacy rebuilding requiring new skills. In addition the Chief Officer took on leading wider OBR assets work. I must acknowledge the Housing team's resilience, continued ambition and notable successes amid much critical challenge.

The report below gives a very brief overview of the huge amount of work done by this portfolio area. Further details can be found [here](#) (P71-77) and in other links within the report.

Council housing: managing the assets:

- Outstanding development of passivhaus family home for a tenant with severe disability
- Marsh scheme house plot currently being built out as four apartments with community room. Pioneering [MMC](#) project in partnership with a local firm upskilling staff
- Dorrington Road garage site development at financial viability stage.
- Skerton site planning permission for 135 high thermal efficiency houses/apartments awaits Highways finalising vehicle access. Consultation carried out by event, door-knocking and letter. Government Brownfield Release Funding reduced demolition costs: site clearance virtually complete
- Residents in Bridge House, Mainway currently supported by officers to move to adjacent apartments or wider council housing due to building deterioration. Monitoring of Mainway continues
- Delays occurred to timelines on both Mainway and Coopers Field development plans but these should now be back on track
- Housing and Property Climate Strategy and Decarbonisation Action Plan is currently at redraft stage

Council Housing service development

The [Social Housing Regulation Act 2023](#) introduced an inspection regime for social housing providers to ensure compliance with consumer standards with the power to issue unlimited fines. A yearly Tenant Satisfaction Measure (TSM) provides data to compare landlords and judge performance.

The act covers all aspects of Housing, in particular safety inspections, repairs and maintenance and complaints (especially damp and mould),

- Complete review of all systems and procedures being carried out
- Identified priorities: repairs and maintenance, ASB, Complaints, Tenant Voice and community engagement rapidly progressed.
- The Social Housing Regulation cabinet member advisory group involving tenants, stakeholders, members and officers now scrutinises social housing

The [TSM](#) This year was just below national average. Extensive work continues in order to prepare for inspection from April 2024 onwards.

In addition all work was done to ensure compliance with new [Fire Regulations](#).

Homelessness/Housing Options service

A new [Homelessness Strategy](#) was completed a year ahead of schedule

- New council-owned provision at Jubilee Court opened ([move on accommodation](#) for rough sleepers).
- Excellent partnership between organisations supporting homeless in the district means all street homeless are met with and offered assistance

Families presenting as homeless increased significantly in year with more [Section 21 evictions](#), families who are victims of domestic violence and asylum seeker families given leave to remain. With little council or housing association property available and few affordable private rentals we acquired hotel or hostel accommodation, but this can be very expensive and unsuitable. Negotiations are ongoing to lease properties for this purpose. To increase efficiency, the Housing Options and Choice Based Lettings Teams have successfully replaced the outdated computer system for applications.

Private and Strategic Housing and other matters

Support continued for asylum seekers and refugees in district, including from Ukraine and Afghanistan, in partnership with agencies and third sector. Consultation was undertaken on Selective Landlord Licensing in West End Morecambe. Greater contact with landlords recreated the Morecambe Landlords' Forum, discussion begun on developing a district Social Lettings Agency. A Housing Taskforce advisory group of local stakeholders meets to consider innovative ways to leverage housing. Energetic officer support for Community-led housing aided the successful completion of the [award winning passivhaus scheme at Lune Walk](#) and the establishment of Lapwing Housing.

Finally the refurbishment of the [Mellishaw Traveller site](#) is final weeks of completion. Substantial grant funding reduced costs for the day room units. Huge credit to officers involved and highly appreciated by our traveller community.



Annual Report - 2023/24

Cabinet Member for Planning and Place Making

The first year of a new administration is always challenging, and this year was no exception. The Climate Change Local Plan Review was initially rejected and is now subject to a further report. The Local Plan Review Group continues to work on an updated plan, and a new parking strategy for the city is now subject to a public consultation.

May I take this opportunity to thank our fantastic officers for all their hard work in this past year, and I look forward to working with them in 2024/25.

Here are the highlights of the last 12 months:

1. Local Government Association (LGA)/Planning Advisory Service (PAS) - Planning Peer Challenge

Following the successful peer review of the Council's planning functions in November 2022, the local planning authority welcomed back the Peers from the LGA/PAS in January 2024 to evaluate the progress that has been made.

The Progress Review was again very encouraging. The Review noted that:

"It is very apparent that during the time since the review team were originally at the Council it has responded to the recommendations from the peer challenge along with new challenges for the Council and the service" and that "significant progress has been made across all of the recommendations".

This external evaluation of the good service offered across all our planning functions is welcome.

2. Progressing the Climate Emergency Local Plan Review (CELPR)

I am pleased to report progress regarding the Climate Emergency Local Plan Review (CELPR). As some Members might recall, the Examination in Public sessions had concluded, but the Government's Planning Inspector did not accept the ambitions of the Council relating to the localised setting of higher energy efficiency standards.

During 2023, officers and Members pushed back on this issue, including appearing at a number of national events to highlight the matter. At the end of 2023 the Government withdrew the 2015 Written Ministerial Statement (WMS), which the Inspector had cited as being a key informant of her opinion and replaced it with a new WMS. Subsequently, the Inspector accepted the Council's position regarding energy efficiency standards, subject to consultation. Once this consultation has concluded, the Inspector will at last provide her written report regarding the 'soundness' of the CELPR.

3. Other plan-making activity

In June 2023 Lancashire County Council announced the suspension of work on the South Lancaster to M6 transport proposals that were to be part-funded by the Housing Infrastructure Fund. This was predominantly due to rising construction costs, and the decision was supported by the City Council and by Homes England.

It enabled the City Council to trigger an 'early review mechanism' of its Local Plan (adopted July 2020). This decision to review the Plan across the whole district was approved by

Cabinet in September 2023, and the decision to amend the plan-making timetable, known as the Local Development Scheme, was approved by Council later that month.

The scoping of the new Local Plan is ongoing, and the timetable will be regularly updated at the Local Plan Review Group meetings. In readiness for the public stages of the process, the Service has prepared a more accessible explanation of the plan-making process, which is available at

<https://local-plan-review-lancaster.hub.arcgis.com/>

It has also been another positive year for Neighbourhood Planning, with Caton-with-Littledale and Slyne-with-Hest successfully adopting their Neighbourhood Plans during the last 12 months. They join Carnforth, Aldcliffe-with-Stodday, Wray-with-Botton and Wennington as areas with Neighbourhood Plans, which are now a material consideration in planning application decisions. Other parishes/areas are also progressing their Neighbourhood Plans. Details are available here:

<https://www.lancaster.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/neighbourhood-planning>

4. Development Management (DM)

In January 2024 the Planning Regulatory Committee approved the Council's new Local Planning Enforcement Plan (LPEP). The LPEP includes a flow-chart explaining the circumstances where the local planning authority will pursue enforcement action and those where it will not. It also includes new service standards that have taken effect in the DM Planning Enforcement Team.

The DM Planning Applications Team continue to have a good track record in terms of national planning performance measurement. At the time of compiling this report, the national 2-year rolling statistics (against which Government measure performance) indicates that between January 2022 and December 2023:

- 85.9% of Major planning applications were determined within the statutory timeframe or within a mutually agreed time limit.
- 90.2% of Non-Major planning applications were determined within the statutory timeframe or within a mutually agreed time limit.

The Government's data regarding the quality of decisions, which is measured as a percentage of decisions that are overturned at appeal, is currently measured on 2-year data between April 2021-March 2023. This indicates:

- Only 2.4% of Major planning application decisions were overturned at appeal; and,
- Only 0.9% of Non-Major planning application decisions were overturned at appeal.

These statistics indicate a good level of service in terms of speed and quality of planning decision-making within the district.

The Service's pre-application advice offer continues to be popular and is out-performing budgetary expectations (see Financial Overview, overleaf), whilst providing developers with the on-site service that they had previously requested.

The DM Building Control service continues to be provided by Capita. As well as winning work (see Financial Overview), they provide excellent support in terms of responding to major incidents and dangerous structures. This includes the former SupaSkips incident, which required significant financial resources and officer time/input across all council disciplines.

5. Developer Forum

In December 2023 the local planning authority held their first Developer and Agents' Forum since Covid. This was a popular event, with approximately 100 developers/agents in attendance. The Forum provided an overview of service activity, including topics such as the Local Plan, housing need, and planning application advice. The Forum also welcomed a couple of external speakers to talk about good housing development examples (Lune Walk, Halton) and matters affecting Electricity North West. It is the intention to run this Forum twice every year (June and December).

6. Financial Overview

Fee income across the three fee-earning areas is predominantly uncontrollable, as the delivery of third-party development proposals will always depend upon numerous external factors, including the national economic context, the availability of the construction workforce (to build out domestic extensions and commercial projects), house prices, and the cost of building materials.

The current fee income headlines across the three fee-earning areas are:

	Budget (£)	Actual (£)	Variance (£)
Building Regulation Fees 2023-24 (to March 31st)	120,088	143,621	+23,533
Planning Application Fees 2023-24 (to March 31st)	825,030	761,459.50	- 63,570.50
Pre-Planning Advice Fees 2023-24 (to March 31st)	35,751	43,587.43	+7,836.43

The two areas where the Council are able to set their own local fees are the areas where we are exceeding budgetary expectations.

Planning application fees are set nationally and, up until December 2023, they had not increased for 5 years. In future years the national fees will also rise linked to inflation (but capped at 10%) from April 2025. The economic downturn has clearly curtailed some developers' ambitions for the time being. But when confidence in the market does improve, planning application fee income is expected to rise sharply.

7. Looking Ahead on Planning

The next 12 months will witness more intense work across all Service areas. By this time next year, the Climate Emergency Local Plan Review will be complete; the district-wide Local Plan Review will be considerably advanced; and more progress will have been made on strategic developments, including the New Hospitals Programme, Health Innovation Campus and, hopefully, a start on site for Eden Morecambe. It promises to be another exciting year for the district.

8. Draft Lancaster City Centre Parking Strategy

A huge amount of work from Officers and Cabinet members has gone into producing a draft Parking Strategy. The draft was approved for consultation purposes at Cabinet in March 2024. The strategy was produced to provide actions for the provision of parking in the short medium and long term and address concerns raised by the local business community and also to assist in the delivery of the Canal Quarter. At the time of writing this report consultation on the draft is underway.

9 Parking Performance

Occupancy levels in all car parks are stabilised since the previous year. Within Lancaster occupancy levels average at around 70% with a peak of 95% in the run up to Christmas. In Morecambe the average occupancy levels are 49% with a peak of 78% in August.

10. Parking Income

For the budget year 23/24 at the end of March the income target was £3,303,600 and actual income was £3,306,598. Income is therefore around the forecast with a very minor positive variance of 0.09%.

A review of parking fees has also been undertaken as part of the budget setting process. Whilst the fees have increased overall by 10% some tariffs and time periods have been altered to better address parking needs in the area and provide a fairer tariff structure. These will come in to force in April 2024. It is worth noting that this is the first increase in parking fees for two years and has been benchmarked against other local authorities' tariffs.

11. Challenges

During the past year the key challenge has been the temporary closure of the Castle Car Park due to water ingress and impact on structural condition. A decision was taken to shut the car park for safety reasons until full engineers reports and proposed remedial works had been identified. The car park lease is complex with the landlord, and this is slowing down the progress on bringing the car park back into use. The aim is to reopen Castle Car Park as soon as possible.

Work continues on the Eden Project Morecambe transport & parking strategy between officers, members, County and other stakeholders.

The National Parking Platform (NPP) is an emerging innovation which is being studied closely and a committee report will be distributed as soon as possible to enable decisions to be made in time for the proposed October 2024 launch.

12. Key Aims 2024/25

For the forthcoming year key aims for the Parking Portfolio are:

- Complete the consultation and full adoption of the Lancaster city centre parking strategy.
- Commence work on the implementation of Lancaster city centre car parking strategy actions.
- Introduce the new fees & permits structure.
- Bring the Castle car park back in to use.
- Resolve the National Parking Platform matter. The NPP is a DfT initiative to introduce from October 2024 a cross platform parking sector app/telephone payments platform which is vendor & operator agnostic, i.e. any app from any operator can work in any car park across the country. We have expressed an interest, and we are working with the NPP to enable the parking team to create a detailed feasibility report (and with other services such as legal) that the NPP is a credible and robust entity to which we can recommend to members to join.
- Complete the Eden transport strategy to enable the planning permission to be signed-off.

Councillor Jean Parr

Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and Place Making

April 2024

Annual Report of the portfolio holder for Visitor Economy, Community Wealth Building and Culture

1. Introduction

It has been an immense privilege this past year to have been the portfolio holiday for these important responsibilities of the Council. It has also involved a very considerable learning curve, getting to know all the key protagonists and partner organisations across the district.

A vibrant and successful visitor economy brings wealth, jobs, opportunities and a great sense of pride in place. A deep and broad cultural sector enhances quality of lives, educates, inspires, entertains and also adds to a love of where we live. And community wealth building should work towards enabling the wealth of our district to be more evenly spread, reducing inequalities and permeating every layer of society. Planning, environmental services and housing might be the bread and butter of the Council but my portfolio is the cherry on the cake!

Before outlining some of the achievements of the Council and the District of the past year, I would like to pay credit to the dedication, creativity and sheer hard work of the Council officers with whom I have worked – they span primarily three different service areas. There is Jonathan Noad and team, notably Richard Hammond, Carolyn Dalton and Tom Fitton who between them look after Eden, cultural strategy and the museums on our behalf. I also work with Alex Kinch and team, notably Alison Gardner, Damian Woolf and Caroline Addison who are responsible for all aspects of marketing, including tourist information and the visitor and inward investment web pages. Then there is Will Griffith whose team includes Richard Hammond and Tom Fitton (again) and Tara Stapleton who look after all our performance and hireable venues and our role in the district's festivals. Thank you all.

The remainder of this report outlines the headline achievements of the past 12 months and the broad intentions of the year ahead.

2. Visitor Economy

A successful visitor economy isn't just about people from elsewhere dipping into our district, enjoying themselves, spending a bit of money and then leaving. It is also about what we residents do on our days off. We are visitors and consumers ourselves. We also benefit from the injection of that visitor spend into our local economy, creating business opportunities, wealth and jobs.

The primary visitor economy project of Lancaster City Council is clearly the development of Eden Project Morecambe. However, over the next three years, we need to ensure that Morecambe, Lancaster and the wider district are ready for the 740,000 expected visitors annually that Eden will generate. So, once the Eden development is underway, our attention needs to turn to everything else that we offer from a tourism and culture perspective and make sure that the whole district is Eden-ready.

2.1 Eden Project Morecambe

Significant progress has been made with Eden over the past year. The following has been achieved:

- Set up formal governance structures for the Eden Partnership and commencement of formal meetings of the Programme Board and Sponsor Group
- Completion of additional evidence base to support the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) including primary tourism market research and a red book valuation of the proposal

- Preparation and submission of an Assessment of Compliance for Subsidy Control for consideration by the Competition and Markets Authority, the positive outcome of which was issued in January 2024
- Undertaken due diligence checks and set up audit and claim processes
- Undertaken an “Impact Review” to re-baseline construction costs and delivery programme
- Commencement of work through 11 workstreams to secure delivery, outputs and outcomes
- Eden Project Ltd have almost completed their negotiations to secure match funding
- The draft and negotiation of a Memorandum of Understanding with govt to secure LUF
- The drafting and negotiation of a Grant Fund Agreement with Eden Project Ltd to provide the structure for claims and use of LUF
- The securing of £2.5 million of development funds from Government, enabling design and development works to continue whilst the final terms are agreed and signed off

A massive amount of Council officer resource has been invested in Eden and we expect that very soon the finer details of all the funding agreements will have been signed off and put to bed. However, in the meantime, the £2.5million of development funds that have been secured by the Council have allowed the preparatory work behind the project to proceed according to plan and we still expect construction works to commence by the end of 2024, a soft opening for locals of Eden by the end of 2026 and the full opening in Spring 2027.

2.2 Museums

The museums are both a tourism and a cultural asset. Due to the 23/24 OBR process the Museums Service underwent a significant re-structure, reducing opening times by around half and staffing from 15.6 FTE to 9.1 FTE. However, despite this reduced service, the staff remain very motivated and work has commenced on ‘Reimagining the Museums’ so that they are ‘fit for the future’ with workshops held and a funding bid submitted for a service improvement study. We have big ambitions for the museums over the years ahead. We recognise that it is several decades since they had any significant investment and redevelopment, whilst the museums of other cities and towns have been comprehensively brought up to date in recent years. We feel it is our turn next. With the very significant influx of new visitors to the district in the coming years, generated by Eden Morecambe, we wish to enhance our visitor experience, encourage visitors to stay longer and appreciate the whole of what our district has to offer. The modernisation of our museum offering has a key role to play in this. In the meantime, some minor works are underway with improvements to entrances, the Maritime café, and retail areas – using a mix of UKSPF and Council capital funding.

Some facts and stats about the museums from 23/24: The museums are becoming more inclusive with 16-34 year olds making up 29% of visitors and 11.3% of visitors being Asian/Asian British or Black/Black British. 16.2% of visitors identify as having a disability. The museum service partnered with several local organisations on projects during the year. Here are but a few examples. 124 young people aged 10-19 took part in the Escape2Make Heritage Market Festival run in partnership with the museums using £75,600 funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund. 98% of young people who took part felt that they had experienced very positive wellbeing and 95% made a new friend. The Touch & See project to increase accessibility for those with sight loss was shortlisted for 3 national awards. The project is run as a partnership between the Museums, the School of Engineering at Lancaster University and Galloways Society for the Blind. The Museums were instrumental in securing £53,000 for the King’s Own Royal Regiment Museum Trustees to undertake the Abyssinia Project, exploring the regiment’s colonial era legacy and objects in their collection. This project has

already attracted international interest. 2023 saw the 100th anniversary of the opening of the City Museum and the 100 podcast series has been downloaded more than 16,500 times from around the world. Altogether the museums have leveraged in £223,600 during 2023/24 to support the museums and local communities.

2.3 Marketing and Tourism Marketing

An Initial Tourism Strategy was written and presented to Senior Leadership as a foundation for the Tourism Partnership Group to build upon. Following this, the inaugural gathering of the Tourism Partnership Group took place, with a view to continuing to develop the reputation of the district.

The team attended the British Tourism & Travel Show with partners to promote the wider area to the travel trade.

It is very positive news that new STEAM (Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) data shows that the district's visitor economy has almost fully recovered from the pandemic with an economic impact of £542 million in 2022. Visitors were up 37% on the year before and our district accounted for 11% of all tourism visits to Lancashire in 2022.

The team has broadened its role by now providing more Council venues and activities with marketing assistance. This includes the rebrand of the Storey with a new logo and signage, and improvements for the building's accessibility are underway.

A wedding website is being built to promote the Council's venues and a Conferencing brochure is underway to promote our venues' hireable spaces.

Now that the Platform, Storey and Ashton Hall are all managed by the same team, supported by the Council's marketing function and with a very clear remit to be run as commercially as possible, I believe that this is a very exciting time for the venues, especially for conferences and national gatherings. Lancaster's geographical location at the very centre of Britain, and its accessibility by rail and car, and being able to provide venues of different types and sizes, we really do have a lot to offer the conference market and we intend to promote this further over the period ahead.

Following the OBR decision to close the VICs, UKSPF funding was secured to deliver a digital transformation project. This initiative includes the development of a completely new tourism website, the contract for which was awarded to a local web developer and is well underway with a target launch in Q1 2024/25. Alongside the new website, six digital tourism touch screens have been installed, aiding the transition to accessible visitor information. A further five digital touch screens will be rolled out in the first quarter of 24/25, to include major transport hubs and high footfall areas. We have secured 20 new partnerships, including County libraries and local heritage centres to become tourist information points (TIPs) and have an additional 78 outlets across the district which display tourism brochures and leaflets. So, whilst some residents are disappointed that the two major visitor information centres are no longer open, the creation of several tourist information points will ensure that visitors can access many places throughout the district to find out more information about what to visit and what's going on.

3. Community Wealth Building

This in some ways is less tangible than the visitor economy and culture parts of my portfolio. It is more an underlying theme in everything that we as a Council should be doing. As we play our role in the regeneration of the district and its economy, it is our responsibility to do everything we can to ensure that the benefits of regeneration permeate through every layer of society - that new jobs are created, that average wages rise, that local businesses are

successful and that the economic benefits are spread as widely and evenly as they can be. It is fundamental that we don't want to see sections of our community looking on hopelessly whilst others are seen to reap all the rewards.

My colleague Cllr Jason Wood has been the architect of a Fair Work Charter for the Council and we are seeking support from the Morecambe Bay Anchor collaborative to encourage employers to adopt our Charter and pay at least the Real Living Wage. I have started asking questions about the Council's procurement policy and how it can be targeted to favour local employers and also how better it can favour the values that we wish to promote. I hope to spend more time on this in my second year in this role.

4. Culture

The third area of my portfolio is that of culture. This is a wide-ranging area of responsibility, embracing the venues and facilities that the council owns and operates, third party cultural organisations that we support with grant funding and organisations in the wider community that the Council supports or enables but doesn't directly contribute to in financial terms. Culture, the arts and heritage stimulate the senses and give meaning to life beyond the mundane. Some might consider arts and culture to be nice-to-have add-ons to the primary and statutory roles of a local authority, however those engaged in this sector would argue that culture, the arts and heritage are fundamental to our local identity, core to place-making, pivotal to enhancing the lives of residents, deliver very positive mental health benefits and, equally importantly, contribute significantly to the economic success of our district, stimulating both the visitor and the local economy.

4.1 Culture & Heritage Strategic Vision

At the beginning of the year the Council approved the Strategic Vision for Creativity, Culture and Heritage that sets out the importance of culture and heritage to the local economy and communities and provides a clear vision for what the Council would like to achieve in the district. In summary the vision is for a significantly raised national and international creative and cultural profile; a strong commitment to environmental responsibility and net zero carbon pathways; the maximisation of local and inward investment for creativity and culture; the development of local creative and cultural activity and talent; a strong innovative heritage offer reflecting the diverse histories of our communities; broad, deep engagement, participation and inclusion in creativity and culture across all our neighbourhood communities; the year-round delivery of a compelling creative and cultural offer for local people and visitors. Our next challenge is to translate this vision into a plan of action.

4.2 Platform

Part-way through the year the decision was made to keep the Platform in-house but to make it more commercially viable in part through the establishment of a Friends group and membership scheme. The Friends of the Platform group has now been established and has over 35 members. Its main purpose is to secure funding to support The Platform and to provide volunteers. The Platform, previously within the Sustainable Growth Service area has now been transferred to the Environment & Place team and is managed alongside the Storey and the Ashton Hall, bringing all our bookable venues under one team.

Key Platform statistics for 23/24: 96 professional shows will have taken place by the end of the year, 16,872 tickets sold, 90 community bookings, 2 conferences and 6 festivals hosted (Food Future, Comic Con, Vegan Fair, Vintage by the Sea, Baylight and Catch the Wind).

Needless to say, the people of Morecambe are delighted that the Platform continues to entertain us.

4.3 The Storey and the Ashton Hall

From April 2023 the team were told to stop taking bookings for Ashton Hall as hospitality was going through an OBR review. Bookings didn't resume until June 2023 so a few events were missed. However, 26 event bookings did take place, notably the 32nd Lancaster Beer Festival. The Ashton Hall's end of year income was circa 96k across room hire and bar sales (the previous closest to this was 2019/2020 where the total income was £65k).

The Storey hosted seven festivals (Litfest, Light Up Lancaster, Jazz Fest, Lancaster Music Festival, Witches Revival, Fashion Revolution Week with the Sewing Café and Pint of Science), 10 exhibitions in the main gallery and 28 free small exhibitions by local artists in The Thomas Storey Room.

The Council's Lancaster venues are increasingly being used for wedding receptions and ceremonies, something we intend to promote further across all venues. In 23/24 we hosted 3 ceremonies and 8 receptions at the Storey and 7 ceremonies and 1 reception at Lancaster Town Hall, helping 19 couples celebrate their big day.

4.4 Arts investments - local arts organisations in receipt of grants from the Council:

The Dukes

Last year The Dukes had a total throughput in excess of 66,000 people across all its productions and events, making it the theatre's most successful year since the pandemic. The Jungle Book production also took place at Williamson Park, with every ticket sold and overwhelmingly positive feedback from audiences.

Ludus Dance

Last year, Ludus moved to The Storey building in Lancaster, creating a dance hub and office base. Ludus also delivered the 'Alien Needs Our Help' project working with 24 Primary Schools reaching more than 3,600 participants over the duration of the project which highlighted the importance of vaccination against various illnesses.

Litfest

In 2023/24 Litfest once again hosted their Spring and Autumn festivals. The Autumn festival took place in October for the second time and has grown significantly since year one. Over both festivals Litfest attracted more than 1,500 people.

More Music

The More Music team delivered several large-scale events, including the Catch the Wind kite festival, the Winter Lantern Parade, Holocaust Memorial Day and a Commemoration of the 2004 cockling disaster, these events being attended by over 20,000 people. This is in addition to the venue's music and community workshops, work with young people and its performance programme running throughout the year.

4.5 Festivals and Events

Event Safety Advisor Group

The council supports the district's Event Safety Advisory Group in the form of chair and secretary. This year more than 25 mid to large scale outdoor events have presented their plans and have received valuable advice and feedback from members which include the Police, NWAS, Fire Service, Highways, Licencing, Legal and Public Realm.

Council Officers have also directly supported 6 local event organisers with the writing and preparation of event safety plans and risk assessments, directly contributing to safer events taking places across the district. This includes both **Pride** events, the **Bay Health Festival**, **Highest Point Festival** and **Baylight**.

And of course there are those events where we play a much more hands on role, providing officer time, stewards and funding. These include:

Brass Bands season at Happy Mount Park

An ever-popular Sunday season of performances across the Spring and Summer from brass bands across Lancashire, consisting of 14 performances during 2023.

Catch the Wind

Two days of kite flying, and diverse entertainment brought thousands of people to Morecambe Promenade. Catch the Wind It is the longest running festival in the district and remains one of the most popular. Unfortunately, this festival will not take place in 2024.

Vintage by the Sea

This year, the Vintage by the Sea Festival celebrated its 10th Anniversary and its busiest year to date. With classic vehicles, live music, vintage crafts and a marketplace, dance classes and dazzling performance pieces, the festival once again continued to be the jewel in Morecambe's festivals crown. The *Vintage by the Sea* festival is a national finalist in the Visit England Tourism Awards, following winning the Lancashire Event of the Year award. The festival, which is organised by Deco Publique and Hemingway Design in partnership with the Council, attracted over 50,000 people into Morecambe over two days in September 2023, its economic impact being estimated at over £1.5M.

Light Up Lancaster

For the first time Light Up Lancaster grew to a full three evening event of Light Art. The festival showcases some of the city's iconic venues and open spaces and attracts a huge audience of 72,215 people from both the district and further afield. This year, the event did not incorporate a Firework display, however economic impact increased from 924K in 2022 to £2.3M in 2023.

Remembrance Sunday

In both Lancaster and Morecambe this year, a service of remembrance took place to commemorate those lost in conflict around the globe. These events attract large audiences of ex and current servicemen and women, as well as a large number of the general public. These events also incorporate a parade, and veterans reception following the service.

5. In conclusion

To conclude, I would like to repeat my thanks to the Chief Officers and their teams who contributed much of the content of this report and whose hard work and dedication every day helps to make this district and all its constituent parts a truly great place to live and to visit.

Cllr Catherine Potter

Portfolio Holder for Visitor Economy, Community Wealth Building and Culture

April 2024

Annual Portfolio Review Regeneration, Skills

Lancaster City Centre

The masterplan for the Canal Quarter was adopted in July 2023 and provides a framework for the future vision and development of the area.

Proposals for the development of the Nelson Street Car Park site have also been out to tender twice. The first round of tender did not meet the aspirations of the Cabinet therefore a further round of tender was undertaken. This has resulted in the identification of a preferred development partner which looks to maximise social housing and energy efficient development opportunities. This development partner was approved at Cabinet in March 2024.

The regeneration function has also contributed to the drafting of a parking strategy for Lancaster City Centre which was approved for consultation purposes in March 2024. Resolving car parking concerns is a keystone to unlock development of the area.

The regeneration team has also been supporting housing colleagues in the proposals for Coopers Field and working with other land owners and interested parties to bring forward their sites within the Canal Quarter.

During 2023/24 final approvals were granted for the refurbishment and bringing back in to use of 1 Lodge Street with the Lancaster Musicians Coop. The project is around £1 million and is funded by the City Council, UKSPF, DLUHC Community ownership Fund and Historic England through the HAZ Programme. Work is currently on site and due to be completed in 2024.

The Mill Race Heritage Action Zone project was completed at the end of March 2024. This resulted in 8 buildings being restored, 235 square metres of public realm improved (with a further 160 sqm due in 2024). Alongside this various guides, tours and training sessions; various elements of heritage interpretation delivered in the built environment including 5 elements of artwork.

Morecambe Town Centre

Attention is being directed to looking at regenerating Morecambe outside of the Eden site. A consultation has been undertaken on the vision and objectives for Frontierland which closed in January 2024. The next steps are to go formally to the market.

A key aim for Morecambe is to provide a Regeneration and Investment Strategy. Draft scope for this has been prepared and funding has been secured from the County Council's Local Economic Regeneration Growth Fund. This will be tendered and underway during 2024/25.

A project to bring back in to use Centenary House is also underway with funding from the Brownfield Land Release Fund of £749,000. Working with PlaceCapital the project will deliver affordable housing and ancillary commercial space.

Economy and Skills

In the middle of 2023-24 this service was restructured around a UKSPF funded project focused on business support and skills. The project is proving very successful and the new staff are making great progress on key outcomes supporting our businesses and training providers. Two provides forums have been established for business support services and skills and training providers. In the first quarter of the UKSPF project 43 businesses were supported by the project. This is significantly ahead of the forecast. The team has also provided significant support to the businesses affected by the Supaskips Fire.

Work on the development of local green construction skills has been progressing, directed by the green skills group, which has been meeting quarterly. The group look forward to one of our local contractors, Baldwins Building Services, becoming the first company in the district to gain Trust mark Accreditation status for both the installation of internal wall insulation and air source heat pumps. This will allow them to complete work using government subsidised schemes. It should be noted that the governments change in timescales for the gas boiler 'phase out' and the pushing back of the need for all rented properties need to attain an EPC rating of 'C' has slowed the desire for local contractors to engage with the green skills training. However we are hoping to increase training through the use of the UKSPF grants to support a more targeted and 'on-site training' approach to bolster local green skills training.

Digitalisation

Work has been on-going to deliver the district digital strategy. This has included the development of the local full fibre network. A review of the digital strategy is planned to be undertaken with an initial meeting scheduled for 18th April.

Markets

Occupancy levels at the Charter Market and Assembly Rooms are around 90% whereas for the Festival Market it is around 75%. A programme for improvement of the markets is currently being devised. Additional marketing and publicity for the markets is also being undertaken and participation in the Love Your Local Market national event is being prepped.

Key Issues for 2024/25

In the forthcoming year key focus of work will be the following:

- Bringing forward the development of the Canal Quarter including Nelson Street development
- Supporting the Parking portfolio delivering actions in the parking strategy
- Commissioning and completing a Morecambe Town Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy
- Developing a Lancaster City Centre visions and investment strategy
- Review of the councils digital strategy
- Ensuring continued success of the Economy and Skills UKSPF project with a view to ensuring sustainability of the team moving forward
- Delivering improvements to the markets service