

ANNUAL REPORT – COMMUNITIES, PARTNERSHIPS and HEALTH and WELLBEING PORTFOLIO

Councillor Peter Jackson

This is wide ranging and varied portfolio with many strands of activity but strongly focussed on partnership working for the good of our communities. I will report under several headings, but much of the work done under those headings interlinks as we develop and facilitate partnership working.

1. SALT AYRE LEISURE CENTRE

Members will know that it has been a difficult year for SALC. Early in the year senior members of staff at the centre left the council's employ for disciplinary reasons. This both left weaknesses in centre management and challenges around staff morale.

A new membership experience manager is now in place and indications from the final quarter of the year are positive, with Gym membership numbers above the level of the previous year at 3452 (3409). Here are a few of the many positive comments in our feedback.

"The centre is truly a community hub. The whole ethos is one of diversity, accommodating the needs of all groups"

"Staff friendly and welcoming. Class availability suits my needs. The centre is always clean"

"Great classes always happy staff and great instructors. Spa is great as well"

"Everything superb from staff to facilities. I swim often and feel welcome as soon as I walk in the door. Excellent standards. Even café food fantastic"

Marketing and outreach have improved. Two "Les Mills" (a workout programme) intro events were well received (90% excellent in feedback) resulting in increased class attendances and SALC being awarded Les Mills "Club of the Month".

Outreach at the International Women's Day event in Williamson Park was successful, and SALC's profile on Instagram is growing rapidly.

The Salt Ayre Cycling Association has complained long and hard about the condition of the road cycling circuit, but thanks to hard work by the public realm teams cleaning the surface and clearing some trees their feedback is also now very positive. A new service level agreement with SACA will soon be in place. The same process with the athletics facilities and the athletics club is getting underway.

This fourth quarter also saw the resolution of our claim for a VAT refund, with a payment of over £350,000 being received – thanks finance team!!

Centre income is below target but above previous year, and as we continue to fill vacancies for swimming teachers, spa therapists and other front-line staff, the targets set for the coming year should be achievable.

Work to bring the data centre to Salt Ayre is ongoing, physical work can start as soon as the legal framework is resolved. Medium term, heat from the data centre will deliver cost savings, and plans are also in formation to increase renewable generation and add battery storage. The potential for savings on energy costs could play a big part in eliminating SALC's financial deficit.

It is important not to look only at the financial performance of Salt Ayre. SALC works with the NHS on healthy weight initiatives, offers facilities and classes to people with disabilities, and

makes a real difference to the overall health and wellbeing of our district. We cannot quantify the social value of the centre in money, but it is very real.

2. LANCASTER DISTRICT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The partnership was signed on August 19th. The founding partners are Council, Lancaster University, University of Cumbria, Lancaster and Morecambe College, Lancaster District Chamber of Commerce, UHMBT, Lancaster District CVS, Lancaster District Arts Partnership. It provides a strategic opportunity for partners to consider opportunities for collaborations in several areas.

LDSP meets quarterly, discussions have included how to achieve the targets in our Local Area Energy Plan and Climate and Nature Strategy, the development of community conversation tools through a project at Lancaster University and strengthening the Arts and Culture infrastructure and visibility of our district. This partnership is at an early stage, member organisations are developing the links and ideas which will produce tangible results.

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Community Connectors team is now working with our Strategic Policy and partnerships team led by Daniel Clarke. They have provided very detailed information on their work this year which I am happy to provide in full on request from members. For this report, here are the edited highlights.

Holiday Activity Fund this year provided 15,288 places to 3655 children at a cost of £441k

Household Support Fund. Our customer services team deliver this funding, which is provided by Government, over £1 million has been distributed, 2196 applications were received, 1328 were awarded. Our wonderful network of food charities was supported with £288k of funding, reaching 4631 households. Support is also given for utilities, food, housing costs, white goods and flooring.

In addition, applicants are referred at their choice to Citizens Advice who offer help with debt management and benefits advice.

The communities team works with our Food Justice Partnership to support our food banks and clubs. Main achievements from this year are the establishment, with community partners, of the Carnforth Food Club. Support for Egg Cup in a financial crisis, a newly announced restructuring of Egg Cup is expected to deliver sustainability. The Food Justice Partnership is in the process of becoming a charity.

Jamie Murphy from our team chairs the Food Futures partnership, which promotes community growing projects. This partnership holds a Food Places silver award, and this coming year will be campaigning to win gold!

Other projects are many – Refugee Cricket project, Lancaster Young Peoples Foundation, participating in distribution of charity funding from the Walney Island Fund, Pots of Possibility and the Lancaster Community Fund.

Supporting Communities together and the Festival of Culture.

4. UKSPF and REPF

I lead Cabinet's decision making on UKSPF and REPF funding. It is a challenge to allocate funding when demand so far outstrips supply. In the past year £3.6 million of UKSPF money was distributed and spent, and a further £391k of REPF (rural) funding also spent. Too many great projects to mention, but to take you to the northern tip of our district for a moment, the Fraser Hall in Cowan

Bridge used a REPF grant of £24,000 to install solar PV on the roof, with battery storage and a remote-control system, as well as improving its kitchen facilities. The result is an improved facility for the village and a more sustainable financial model going forward.

Funding for this year is reduced, the UKSPF element is already allocated, the REPF process is not yet underway.

5. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

I took over as chair of the CSP in August 2025. The partnership to which Police, Fire and Rescue, Education, Health, BID, Housing, Youth Offending Team, County representatives and many others are invited, meets quarterly. It receives detailed reports from Police Analysts about offending in our district, feedback from Partners about specific events, and discusses emerging threats. Partnership priorities are Anti-Social behaviour, Domestic Violence. It also liaises with the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and applies for funding when the commissioner makes money available for various initiatives. A current concern is the dangerous use of ebikes and escooters in our pedestrianised spaces, and a consultation on extending our Public Space Protection orders to cover this issue will be launched soon.

A Safe and Secure meeting in November brought together Lancaster City Centre stakeholders to address issues of rough sleeping, begging, ASB, street drinking and shoplifting. A successful event leading to effective actions by partners.

6. LANCASTER HEALTH AND WELLBEING PARTNERSHIP

This partnership, chaired by Yak Patel of Lancaster CVS, involves Strategic Health leads, GP surgeries and our Integrated Care Communities, also representatives of County Council services, Housing, Active Lancashire and Citizens Advice. Priorities identified are Adult Mental Health, Suicide Prevention, Early intervention with Children and young people in priority wards and Community resilience. A recent highlight is the “Help is Close” mental health campaign developed by Sarah Baines of the Lancaster ICC. There is currently funding for a smoking cessation project, and an early intervention campaign in relation to Adult Social Care. Excellent cross disciplinary work at grassroots level between health and housing partners is also noteworthy.

7. YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK

I represent Council on the Park Authority and serve on its Finance and Resources Committee. Despite reduced funding from a primarily urban focussed government, the park continues to deliver initiatives in improving access for less physically able users such as “Miles without Stiles” and Multiuser routes, it operates visitor centres and car parks and currently its farm advisors distribute funding under the FIPL (Farming in Protected Landscapes) scheme. It is the planning authority for the park area. As with all local authorities, the park is being asked to do more, especially around biodiversity and access in this case, but with less finance from Government.

8. FRONTIERLAND PROJECT BOARD

I chair this board with effect from November 24. The process of developing a project with possible developer partners is ongoing based on the established council development priorities for the site. Of course, this is commercially sensitive and confidential.

9. PUBLIC FUNERALS & COMMUNITY HEALTH

Perhaps I could have chosen to end on a more cheerful note. Our Community Health Manager, Mark Woodhead, takes referrals from the Coroner, the RLI, Residential Homes and next of kin, where a death occurs, and a public funeral may be needed. In 15 of the 43 enquiries next of kin were found and no public funeral occurred. 28 public funerals were delivered, 10 wholly at our cost, and we are recovering costs from the deceased's estate where possible.

The Community Health element of this role involves early intervention to help vulnerable households with situations, often around waste and hoarding, which have got on top of the residents. Council is also often the first point of contact where more difficult vulnerabilities are found, and multi-agency work is initiated to support and safeguard the most vulnerable residents or households.

In conclusion

The work I have been describing has brought me into contact with many council officers. They have invariably been helpful and responsive to my questions, and I am consistently impressed by their professionalism, skills and good humour. I also come into regular contact with our voluntary sector, and members will know that we are blessed with many determined and capable workers running our brilliant charities and voluntary organisations. I believe our council's commitment to partnering with the VCSFE sector as well as all other stakeholders in our district is delivering real benefits for our residents.