

Annual Report Leader of the council – Caroline Jackson

As far as possible this report reflects matters for the year 2024-2025.

Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) – principal spokesperson report

Since Autumn 2024 I have been involved in the Lancashire District Leaders meetings which have mainly covered the advent of the County Combined Authority and the requirements of LGR. I have also represented Lancaster district at the North West Regional meetings covering developments in Adult Care, Looked After Children and Developing AI. District Leaders in Lancashire have achieved unanimity in facing the Government requirements for unitarisation despite serious challenges and with Chief Executives were instrumental in responding to the 21 March deadline as part of a united 15 authority response. Throughout the process I have maintained the point that we are not against unitarisation, we recognise the difficulties within the local government system that central government wishes to address and wish to respond flexibly and innovatively but our role is to ensure that whatever future we agree to represents the best result for all our district and fits into an overall positive future for Lancashire.

I have chaired our internal cross-party Task Group on LGR and with Mark Davies have met with individual district leaders from Preston, Wyre and Ribble Valley to discuss the issues and possibilities arising from the situation. I have also been part of the national LGA Task and Finish Group on Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation and profited from the wider views and commissioned work they are doing on the changes to responsibilities and the financial side of recent unitarisation.

Following the May election, we expect a hectic period of work on preparing a submission for the government November deadline that is likely to involve both me and the Chief Executive as well as possibly other officers. Councillors will recognise that this will undoubtedly impact us, as with all councils, in reducing the short-term capacity available for other elements of council business.

Priorities and Principles

The Council Plan has now been in place since January 2024 and its principles are well embedded in the work of the council, both officers and members. The budget process took account of the council plan in allocating resources and cabinet has recently established specific priorities to be discussed and aligned with Senior Leadership team. More detailed outcomes and timelines are currently being developed into a coherent plan that will also inform and be informed by our Fit For The Future joint working groups. The bi-weekly OBR coordination meetings and the quarterly performance reports are providing regular monitoring points.

Communications

As resources become more squeezed and the state of local councils is more often in the news, communications is becoming an essential factor in managing local relationships, helping resident expectations and ensuring people feel involved and valued by the city council. The Communications team has undergone a number of changes over the last two years and has partially embedded developments suggested by the LGA one day visit in 2023. The report below indicates the powerful work that is going on and will be developed over the coming year.

Over the past 12 months, Lancaster City Council's Communications Team has played a pivotal role in promoting the council and its services both externally and internally.

Areas of responsibility include:

- Media relations - managing a number of high-profile issues proactively (issuing of press releases and statements), organising media briefings, and working with councillors and officers to respond to media enquiries.
 - Examples include: the snap General Election, the future of Frontierland, former Skerton High site and Mainway, Eden Project Morecambe, the budget and Fit for the Future.
- Enquiries: Beyond Radio, Lancaster Guardian, Daily Mail, The Express, The FT, Computer Weekly, The Telegraph, Arts Professional, Lancashire Business View and many more.
- Website as primary communications tool, providing service information allowing our communities to 'do business' through its digital portals and to pay for services.
 - Over the last 12 months the website has seen 346k unique visitors, with a total of 2.3million page views. Further development work is planned in 2025/26.
- Social media is increasingly important so over the last 12 months the Communications Team has launched a Tiktok channel to capitalise on short form video, reaching an audience of 93k with a total of 107,169 video views.
- A Nextdoor channel has had 58,452 impressions over the last 12 months. Facebook continues to be strong the corporate page (@lancastercc) has had a total reach of 1.7million post impressions, with 134,527 video views. Instagram: a total of 117,154 post impressions and total reach of 88,47, The council currently maintains a Twitter/X account and is also on Linked-in to communicate with the business community.
- Filming enquiries – we are working closely with Creative England to showcase the district very successfully

In addition to The Bay, now on its fifth series, shows filmed in the district over the last 12 months that the Communications Team have helped to facilitate include the One

Show, Lazarus (Netflix production to be aired in 2025), 22 Kids and Counting, Four in a Bed, and a TNT Sports documentary.

Internal communications

Internal communications: Communications Team publishes a weekly newsletter with a variety of features including corporate information and news from services, and the intranet also continues to be developed. The team also supports colleagues from other services to run internal events such as the annual staff conference.

Eden Project Morecambe

During 2024-2025 the Eden Project has had to take time to work on the full business case with consultants to submit to a new government and on the establishment of match funding. The Full Business Case for Eden was submitted to Government in August 2024 and gained its approval. This led to the awarding of the full £50 million of Levelling Up Funds for the project in November 2025.

Since November the securing of funding has enabled work to progress on detailed designs with the appointment of WSP and the architects Grimshaws. The Eden team has been well aware of the need to establish itself within Morecambe and has gone through the recruitment process for a new Project Director who will start and be based in Morecambe from May 2025.

The Community Conversations have recommenced with several hundred people attending. The latest focused on the achievement of the Morecambe Bay Curriculum supported by Lancaster University and was held at the Winter Gardens in March 2025 with over 350 people attending. Meanwhile the workstreams associated with Eden have been progressing detailed work particularly transport, led by Lancashire County Council and community.

I now have a regular meeting with the Chair of Eden Trustees and we are expecting the sponsor group meetings between ourselves, Eden and Lancaster University to recommence this summer. Both key funders and MHCLG are very positive about current progress. Final designs and programme will be revealed in the summer as Eden moves into the delivery phase under Project Director John Pye. Given that we are moving towards the capital build attention will switch to ensure wider outcomes are achieved such as social value, supply chain and supporting local businesses.