

LANCASTER  
CITY COUNCIL

Promoting City, Coast & Countryside



# COUNCIL HOUSING ANNUAL REPORT

2022-23



**This report is written most of all for those who live in our council homes across the entire Lancaster District. We want you to know what happened over the year, what your rent was there to fund, how well we do our job and which things need changing and improving. The report has been designed to be an interesting and hopefully easy to read. Please tell us what you think.**

Over the year tenants give feedback, come to meetings, and take part in the Tenants' Voice. As the cabinet member with responsibility for Housing I am always happy to receive emails and phone calls from you because they help me, and everyone involved in Council Housing, to focus on what needs doing. In 2023, I am pleased to see we have had the launch of the Council Housing Community Safety Team. This came about because anti-social behaviour was a real issue for tenants after lockdown. Over the next year, I hope it will make a real difference to how happy people feel about living in their homes and their neighbourhoods.

I am truly proud of the City Council Housing team and the many jobs they do - and have done - over the past year. I am also endlessly impressed by the way tenants look after their homes, their neighbours, and their communities. I look forward to meeting more of you and to even greater improvements next year.

*Caroline Jackson*

Deputy Leader of Lancaster City Council  
Portfolio Holder (Housing & Homelessness)



**Welcome to our annual report which reviews the delivery of services from April 2022 to March 2023 and looks at what's been happening by the Lancaster City Council Housing Team, in your homes and estates.**

These twelve months have continued to be like no other. We recognise that whilst residents across the district started to adjust to life post-pandemic, increased inflation and energy price rises have impacted residents significantly as well as impacting on our ability to deliver against our ambitions. These challenges have also seen more and more residents joining our waiting lists for social housing as residents across the district struggle with accessing housing elsewhere. If you find yourself struggling in any way please reach out to one of our teams for advice and support!

Despite the difficulties of the past year, it has been important that we continue to prepare for the changes to social housing regulation which come into effect on 1st April 2024. As such our dedicated Compliance Team

have ensured homes remain safe and we have worked closely with Resolve (an anti-social behaviour expert) having listened to feedback from residents to review and improve our approach to how we tackle ASB in our homes and estates, this will evolve further throughout 2023. At the end of the year it has been fantastic to see the transformation in homes on Mount Avenue where we have undertaken whole house improvements and would like to thank the residents for their support during this disruption.

We welcome your feedback on this report and our services so please feel free to get in touch and let us know how we're doing.

*Jo Wilkinson*

Chief Officer – Housing and Property  
Lancaster City Council



82%

of tenants satisfied with the housing service overall

# COUNCIL HOUSING PERFORMANCE DATA Q4

Here is a general overview of how we performed between Apr-Mar 2022/23 in a number of key areas.



## INCOME MANAGEMENT



**£89,584**

Current Tenant Arrears



**9.5%** reduction from previous year



**£9,400+**

less rent arrears owed by our tenants



## EMPTY PROPERTIES



We let 175 homes with a:

**27.9 DAY**

Average relet time

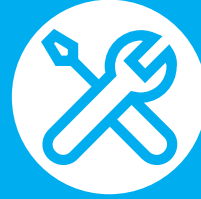


**£330,526**

of rent was unable to be collected due to empty properties



This is a **2.3%** increase to annual rent lost to empty homes. Equalling over **£7,350**



## REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE



**88.5%**

of standard repairs carried out within target time



**100%**

of council homes had a valid gas certificate



**87%**

repairs completed at first visit



**94.9%**

of appointments made were kept.



## ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR



We opened

**241**

ASB reports - 75 more than the previous year



**315**

cases of ASB were closed in the same time period



**94.9%**

of ASB cases closed were resolved



Noise Nuisance is the most common type of ASB - making up 15% of all reports.

During the 2022/23 financial year, the housing team have been focusing strongly on:

- Supporting tenants to manage their finances during the cost of living crisis;
- Reviewing our anti-social behaviour approach, to deliver a more customer focused & harm centred service;
- Managing housing compliance issues, ensuring tenant safety in the home;

# EXPLORING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN ACTION

How we are working to deliver social value across the district:



## NO POVERTY

Income maximisation efforts have increased annual household income, contributing to poverty reduction.



## GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Providing adaptations and supporting residents through community activities supports this goal.



## AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Energy Support Officer's work on energy support and installing solar panels on bungalows aligns with this goal.



## SUSTAINABLE CITIES & COMMUNITIES

Focus on community engagement, community plans, neighbourhood improvement projects, and events supports the development of sustainable communities.



## PEACE, JUSTICE, AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Actions against anti-social behaviour and the establishment of a dedicated ASB team contribute to peace and justice in housing communities.



## ZERO HUNGER

Our teams have financially contributed towards two food schemes.



## QUALITY EDUCATION

Five staff members have been supported with working towards a qualification. Our teams have also provided careers advice seminars within four schools.



## DECENT WORK & SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Our teams have employed four apprentices.

By aligning our work with these SDGs, we aim to contribute to a more sustainable, equitable, and prosperous future for our tenants and communities.

# OUR SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

We are proud to present the highlights from our annual Service Improvement Plan:.



## APPRENTICESHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

We've welcomed four apprentices to our team, offering opportunities for young talent and skill development.



## DEDICATED COMPLIANCE TEAM:

Our new Compliance Team focuses on health and safety in our properties, ensuring a safer living environment.



## HOUSING OMBUDSMAN'S COMPLAINTS CODE:

We improved our complaint handling processes based on the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Code.



## RESOLVE PARTNERSHIP:

We partnered with Resolve, experts in handling anti-social behaviour (ASB), to enhance our approach.



## NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT RESTRUCTURE:

Our Neighbourhood Management Team now includes a dedicated ASB Team, showing our commitment to addressing anti-social behaviour.



## HOUSING EXPANSION:

Approved planning for social housing units at Alder Grove.



## COMMUNITY EVENTS:

Two successful summer events were organised on Council Housing estates.



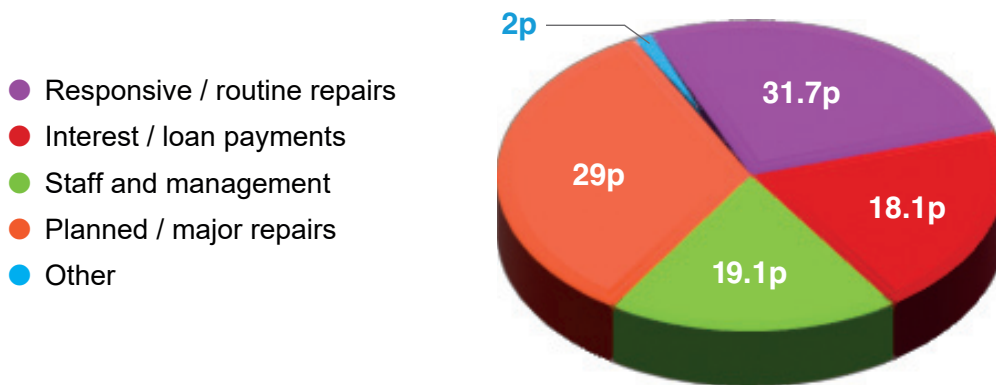
# HOW WE SPENT YOUR MONEY



We've been working as hard as ever to manage our finances carefully. Our total budget is £16.4 million. We have spent this on:

- Maintaining and improving homes across the district; delivering tenancy and neighbourhood services; providing Independent Living services to almost 600 tenants; supporting community projects; and much more
- We also take every opportunity to spend your money with local businesses when we deliver our services, to make sure we are contributing as much as possible to the success of the Lancaster District.

## FOR EVERY £1 IN RENT AND SERVICE CHARGE YOU PAY WE SPEND:



**£4.6 MILLION**

on responsive and routine repairs

**£4.2 MILLION**

on planned and major repairs – kitchens, bathrooms, windows, roofing, etc.

**£300,000**

on adaptations to support independence in the home

**£500,000**

on additional compliance works to keep you safe in your home

**£1 MILLION**

on energy efficiency and boiler replacements

**£700,000**

on re-roofing and window renewals

**£320,000**

on neighbourhood and community projects and tenant engagement

## AWARDS

Throughout the year, the teams continued to receive national recognition for their work and achievements:



**COUNCIL OF THE YEAR – UK HOUSING AWARDS (WINNER)**

**N<sup>®</sup> NORTHERN HOUSING AWARDS**

**COUNCIL OF THE YEAR - NORTHWEST ENERGY EFFICIENCY AWARDS (SHORTLISTED)**

# COMPLAINTS




We take complaints seriously and are committed to improving our complaint handling process. Starting on April 1, 2022, the new Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code came into effect. In response, we self-assessed our services against this code in October 2022. Changes were made to our housing complaints policy to align with the new code. You can review both the self-assessment and the updated complaints policy on our website.

To ensure that our entire housing service team understands the principles of complaint handling, reporting procedures, and the importance of learning from complaints, we rolled out comprehensive complaints training throughout the 2022/23 period. This training is relevant to all staff roles across our service.

In addition, we developed and published an Unacceptable Behaviour Policy to clarify expected behaviours for tenants and other customers when interacting with our housing service.

By the end of the year, we received a total of 45 stage 1 complaints. We were able to acknowledge 91.1% of these complaints within the 5-day target timeframe and responded to 66.6% of them within the 10-day target. Additionally, three of these complaints were escalated to stage 2. We are dedicated to improving our performance in responding to complaints throughout 2023/24.

THE LESSONS WE LEARNED FROM THESE COMPLAINTS INCLUDE THE NEED FOR:		WHAT WE ARE DOING AS A RESULT OF WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT:
Improved communication from the repairs team to ensure tenants are informed if a repair needs to be rescheduled for any reason.		Starting in 2023, we will contact you if we need to reschedule your repair, or if your repair is delayed.
Better communication with individuals reporting anti-social behaviour (ASB) to keep them informed about the progress of their cases and the potential or desired outcomes.		In 2023, we are introducing a dedicated Community Safety Team, who will keep you updated when you report anti-social behaviour to us.
The requirement for a dedicated approach to noise nuisance, recognising that not all noise nuisance is ASB, and handling it appropriately.		In 2023, we will introduce a noise nuisance policy 

**Housing**  
Ombudsman Service

If you are unhappy with your experience or the outcome of our complaints process the Housing Ombudsman Service is available to offer support and guidance, and to escalate and investigate your complaint experience where necessary. You can contact them by calling **0300 111 3000**, or by emailing [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

# RENT AND SERVICE CHARGES



**0.61%**

Of our annual rent due, was arrears (owed) at year end. This is in the top quarter of social housing providers.

**£89,584**

In terms of pounds and pennies this is...£89,584. This is lower than in previous years.

**357**

Just 357 of our tenants were in arrears at the year end. This is approximately 10% of our tenants

**£251**

The average amount of arrears per case was just £251.

## Here's a snapshot of what we've been doing to support you:

### Boosting Your Income:

We've assisted tenants in gaining an additional £94,300 in income, benefiting both new and existing residents.

### Tenancy Health Checks:

Throughout the year, we conducted 374 checks to identify any issues and provide support for successful tenancies.

### Budgeting and Credit Advice:

Our services include guidance on budgeting and credit to help you manage your finances effectively.

We take pride in the positive relationships our tenants share with their Income Management Officers. Together, we've successfully managed and prevented rent arrears, with only five cases escalated to a possession hearing and two tenants evicted due to persistent rent arrears during 2022/23.

## Here's a real-life example of how we've made a difference:

### Boosting Your Income – A Success Story:

One tenant needed a wet room installed for his wife, who had fallen very ill. Facing a contribution of £3,100 for the conversion, our Income Management Officer stepped in. After identifying that the tenant's wife was not claiming Attendance Allowance, we assisted them in applying. This resulted in an award, and our officer helped the tenant apply for Carers Allowance, increasing their Housing Benefit from £23.72 to £40.71 per week. This equated to an annual benefit income increase of £6,106.52. With the new benefits in place, the contribution to the conversion was reduced to £855, saving the tenant £2,245.

## We've also been working to make your houses feel more like homes:

### Furnished Tenancies:

Furniture packages have become increasingly popular, with 89 new packages opened during 2022/23 at an average cost of £26.92. These packages play a significant role in helping tenants sustain their tenancies.

### Service Accreditation:

All our efforts with tenants are crucial for maintaining our accreditation through the Housing Quality Network (HQN), an external organisation that assesses our services and assures us that we're on the right track.



# YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD



In August 2022, we brought the whole Housing Team together for a community-wide 'door knock' on the Branksome and Hala estates. The goal was to have friendly doorstep conversations with you, our residents, to understand what matters to you, what you'd like to see more of, and how we, as the housing team, can be of assistance. Following these door knocks, we organised two fantastic community fun-days, creating opportunities for us to connect even further.

## COMMUNITY PLANS:

From these events, we've developed a community plan for Branksome, and the Hala community plan is currently in progress. Notably, we achieved a significant milestone with the Ryelands Community Plan, which residents' groups approved in October 2022. The plan outlines our shared goals for the estate and includes commitments from our housing team to support this vision.



48

Conducting 48 estate walkabouts, joined by residents, elected members, and partners from across the district.

170

Completing 170 tenancy audits. These audits support various aspects of tenancy maintenance, property condition, energy support, and more.

197

Making 197 post-allocation visits to new tenants to identify any early financial, repair, or general tenancy-related issues.



# ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (ASB)



Our team has been hard at work responding to 256 new cases of anti-social behaviour. The most frequently reported issues were noise disturbances (77) and incidents of verbal abuse, harassment, and intimidation (43).

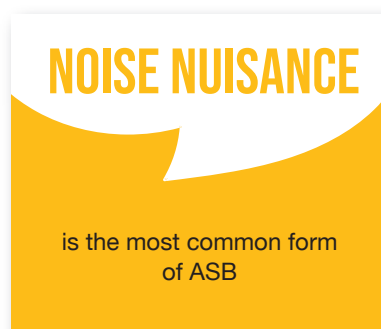
Recognising the complexity of noise-related concerns, we are addressing the problem with a new noise nuisance policy set to launch in 2023/24.

Throughout the year, we took decisive actions against tenancies to ensure the safety and well-being of our residents:

- In September 2022, we evicted a tenant due to serious concerns regarding a potentially dangerous dog at an address in Heysham.
- In November 2022, we enforced the terms of the Council's introductory tenancy to evict a tenant causing disturbances, threatening visitors, and abusing staff. This followed a series of warnings and opportunities to resolve the issues.
- Towards the end of 2022, we served a Demotion Order notice due to threats made towards staff, intimidating behaviour affecting flats, and damage to our premises. Subsequently, we obtained an Injunction to prevent this behaviour from continuing.

## GETTING SPECIALISED HELP

To improve our Anti-Social Behaviour service, we commissioned Resolve in 2022/23 for a comprehensive review. Their recommendations, based on best practices, have led us to establish a new approach to Anti-Social Behaviour, Domestic Violence, and Hate Crime. We are excited to introduce a dedicated Community Safety Team within the Housing Service, aiming for a positive impact in 2023.



Our team remains active in representing the authority at MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conferences), ensuring a coordinated approach to the most vulnerable and at-risk cases related to Domestic Abuse in our council's housing stock. We continue to support the delivery of Sanctuary works within council homes for those experiencing domestic abuse, making practical adjustments and adaptations to homes to ensure the safety and protection of those at risk of harm.

# SUPPORTING YOU AND YOUR TENANCY

At the close of the year, we were actively supporting 67 residents, with an additional 36 referrals for support awaiting assignment to a team member. Throughout the year, we received 187 referrals, highlighting the demand for our services.



Our service is designed to address issues related to income, finance, debt, utilities, and providing support to those facing mental health difficulties. We recognise our role in assisting tenants in maintaining their tenancies and being a vital resource for some of the more vulnerable households across the district.

One of our notable achievements in 2022/23 has been in maximising income. We successfully increased the annual income for 45 households by a total of £212,000. Moreover, we secured one-off grants and back payments for 62 residents, amounting to £115,000. This work is complementary to the efforts of our Income Management Team.



# ALLOCATING AND LETTING COUNCIL HOMES



registered for 2 years or more



Over 50% require a 1 bed property

2,739

households registered with Ideal Choice Homes

23

applicants require a fully adapted property

On average, we re-let standard void properties in

**27.92 DAYS**

At the end of the year, we had a total of 2,739 applicants seeking housing, an increase of 181 compared to the previous year (2021/22). Concurrently, we had 251 vacant properties ready for new tenants, down from 310 in the previous year.

Our team has been actively advertising new properties built by our partner Registered Providers, including a substantial scheme in Heysham and smaller rural developments in Halton and Over Kellet.



# ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY



Our Community Engagement Officer has been hard at work throughout 2022/23, focusing on various activities to enhance our community:

- **Summer Fun Days:**  
We organised enjoyable summer fun days in Hala and Branksome.
- **Tenant Training Programme:**  
We've conducted a tenant training programme covering food safety (essential for community events), funding applications, and consumer regulation.
- **Supporting Community Groups:**  
We've been working closely with community groups to fund various projects through the housing team's Neighbourhood Community Projects Fund. Some of the successful projects include support for the Cornerstones Community Café in Lancaster City Centre, a creative activities club by Ludus Dance in Ryelands, and assistance for the Westgate Community Group to improve the outdoor spaces in their estate.

In addition to these activities, we're always exploring new ways to ensure that your voices are heard in our service delivery. This includes the District Wide Tenants' Forum, support for various resident groups, the Neighbourhood Community Project Funds panel, which assesses and approves spending on project funds, and our day-to-day services, such as in-person service charge sessions at Independent Living Schemes. These sessions are facilitated by our Income and Administration Manager in response to rising energy costs.

130

engagement events held by  
Council Housing Officers in  
2022/23

1,799

contacts made with  
tenants at these events



# INDEPENDENT LIVING

Our scheme activities have been flourishing, and it's great to see more tenants getting involved and socialising. Here's what's been happening in our schemes:



## COFFEE MORNINGS:

We've been enjoying some friendly chats over coffee.



## CRAFT AFTERNOONS:

Creative and fun afternoons working on various craft projects.



## QUIZZES:

Testing our knowledge and having a good time with quizzes.



## BINGO:

Some exciting rounds of bingo to add a bit of thrill to our gatherings.



## BACON BUN MORNINGS:

We've relished in some delicious breakfasts with bacon buns.



## ORGANISED DAY TRIPS:

Day trips have been organised with residents to destinations such as Bury Market.



In addition to our regular activities, we've had some special events that made 2022/23 memorable. We've organised more outings and on-scheme events, and enthusiastically celebrated the spirit of Christmas with parties, meals out, and carolling. We also celebrated the Jubilee and had a heartwarming Valentine's event at Parkside Court.

As the year drew to a close, we initiated the scheme equipment upgrade programme. We began by replacing the old analogue alarm and monitoring equipment with digital systems at Kingsway Court in Heysham. This upgrade is in preparation for the 2025 digital switchover and will be extended to the rest of the schemes in 2023/24. This not only improves safety and provides reassurance to our residents but also enables our Independent Living Team to continue delivering responsive and reliable services to this vulnerable resident group.

# REPAIRING AND MAINTENANCE



It was another busy year for the team, who completed almost 11,000 responsive repairs during the year. Some customers may have experienced longer wait times for their repairs due to delays in obtaining materials and reduced resources. Our top priority, as always, was to address emergency repairs, with around 2,500 completed during the year, making up 23% of all repairs. Over 99% of these repairs were done within the 24-hour target time.



**OVER 10,000  
REPAIRS COMPLETED  
IN 2022/23**



**90% OF  
APPOINTMENTS  
KEPT**



**88% OF JOBS  
COMPLETED ON THE  
FIRST VISIT**

## PLANNED MAINTENANCE

We've been prioritising the removal of composite (plastic) fencing on our estates. This initiative was prompted by a fire incident behind properties on Ryelands in July 2021. Our decision to remove plastic fencing and replace it with "slot-in" timber panels was driven by safety concerns. This work was completed on all large estates in 2022/23. Our partnership with the Fire Service has set a positive example for other housing providers. We also resumed our kitchen installation program in May 2022, with 127 properties benefiting from new kitchens during the year.

## ASSET MANAGEMENT AND TECHNICAL TEAM

Throughout 2022/23, we completed and initiated various schemes of work, including a roofing program, a boiler and central heating system project, the installation of alarms, disabled adaptations, whole-house improvements, solar panels, and more. March 2023 saw the end of the whole home improvement contract, improving the 27 properties on Mount Avenue – including extensive energy efficiency works.

# KEEPING YOU SAFE AND WARM



## COMPLIANCE TEAM

Our dedicated team has a focus on maintaining the health and safety requirements of your home.

### Key Developments:

- **Dedicated Compliance Team:**  
We have successfully established a dedicated compliance team, playing a pivotal role in enhancing our overall compliance processes.
- **Electrical Safety Inspection Frequency:**  
In 2022/23, we successfully transitioned from a ten-year electrical inspection regime to a more rigorous five-year inspection schedule. This change aligns us with industry standards adopted by many housing organisations, ensuring a more proactive approach to electrical safety.
- **Fire Safety Measures:**  
We have implemented essential fire safety measures across Mainway and our Independent Living Schemes. This investment ensures our compliance with building safety legislation and further enhances the safety of our tenants.

As of March 2023, we are well-positioned to strengthen our compliance efforts further. Ongoing initiatives include fire door testing and smoke and carbon monoxide testing.

## ENERGY SUPPORT OFFICER

**Due to rising energy costs, there has been an increased demand for support from our Energy Support Officer.**

During 2022/23, 280 visits to tenants were carried out, offering various interventions and advice, and our support officer played a crucial role in the Local Authority Delivery (LAD) programme, which provides additional funding to improve energy efficiency measures in our homes.

100%

Properties with a valid  
Landlord Gas Safety Record  
(LGSR)

### All communal areas achieved:

100%  
COMPLIANCE

for gas

100%  
COMPLIANCE

for electric

100%  
COMPLIANCE

for fire safety

100%  
COMPLIANCE

for water hygiene

100%  
COMPLIANCE

for lift  
maintenance

100%  
COMPLIANCE

for asbestos  
management

# LISTENING & HELPING



Our dedicated Customer Service team have provided services throughout the year, both remotely and in-person at the MyMainway Hub.

In the past year, we received 33,000 calls from residents, and our average waiting time for a customer was just 36 seconds. Simultaneously, our team managed over 16,000 emails.

As part of our commitment to your well-being, we proactively reached out to 117 vulnerable older residents aged 75 and above, who don't live in independent living schemes, before Christmas. Our 'winter health check' initiative aimed to provide them with support and advice to ensure their well-being during the colder months.

## NEED TO GET IN TOUCH?

Please find essential contact information and online resources below to assist you in accessing our services. Should you have any questions or feedback, feel free to reach out to us through any of the following channels:

**Customer Services:** For any general inquiries, tenant support, or housing-related questions, our dedicated Customer Services team is available to assist you. Reach out to us via phone at **01524 582 929** or through email at **councilhousing@lancaster.gov.uk**.

**Ideal Choice Homes:** Our service for the allocation of social housing, Ideal Choice Homes, offers a wide range of housing options and related services.

To explore available properties, or to simply discuss your specific requirements, visit the website at **idealchoicetohomes.co.uk** or contact Ideal Choice Homes directly at **01524 582 005** for assistance.

To access Ideal Choice Homes' bidding system at any time, you can use our 24-hour automated bidding line. Dial **0845 505 8230** to use this service and participate in housing allocation bids effortlessly.

**Official Website:** For comprehensive information about Lancaster City Council Housing's services, policies, and resources, please visit our official website at **lancaster.gov.uk/housing/council-housing**. Here, you can find valuable insights into the application process, tenancy guidelines, and other relevant topics.

**Stay Connected With Us On Social Media:** For the latest updates, news, and community engagement, follow Lancaster City Council Housing on our social media platforms and stay informed about housing-related events and announcements:

- Connect with us at **facebook.com/LanCityHousing**
- Stay in the loop at **twitter.com/LCC\_Housing**
- Enjoy our media at **instagram.com/lancaster\_city\_council\_housing**

## VISIT OUR HUBS:

If you live on one of our estates or schemes, you can always pop into one of our housing hubs:

### MyMainway Hub:

Open Monday, Tuesday & Thursday  
10.00 – 16.00

### Morecambe Town Hall

Open Monday to Friday  
9.00 – 13.00

### Lancaster Town Hall

Open Monday to Friday  
9.00 – 13.00