

Appendix 3 – Strategic Meeting Themes

Since June 2023, strategic meetings have focused on key themes, pressures and emerging issues including housing, children's services, health, crime and community safety, third sector and crisis support. Updates have been provided by local expert speakers. Highlighted points include:

Housing

- Issues stemming from rental liability increases, financial pressure from increased living costs, and the gap between the average rent cost and the local housing allowance (the rate of which hasn't increased since 2020) are all increasing.
- Private landlords are also reporting the impact of higher interest rates with some withdrawing from the market.
- The private sector has been a critical element of Leeds Housing Options solutions, but the continuously changing backdrop is making the prevention and relief of homelessness exceptionally difficult.
- This is intensified by the limited availability of social sector housing, which is impacted by high levels of need, leading to significant wait times.
- In Leeds, temporary accommodation placements have increased during the 2022/23 financial year with most families requiring a placement due to being asked to leave accommodation by family/friends, partly due to the increased cost of utilities and food, with the second highest reason for being loss of private sector accommodation.
- Quality of housing stock across all sectors, particularly in terms of energy efficiency is also of significant concern. Issues of damp and mould are increasingly prevalent, in many cases compounded by households being unable to effectively heat and ventilate their homes.

Children & young people – Childrens Services

- Increases seen in the number of looked after children, safeguarding issues, and reported cases of children and young people being criminally exploited, including via organised crime.
- Shortages of social workers and difficulties with both recruitment and retention are compounding the scale of the challenge.
- Significant concerns relate to housing. Many families living in poor quality housing are frequently reluctant to report conditions, either directly to the landlord or via enforcement routes due to fears of eviction.
- Outbreaks of health conditions which have become severe and recurrent due to families being unable to afford the cost of treatment have been identified
- Government plans to increase childcare hours are unachievable with current levels of staffing/ funding.

Health

- Frontline health practitioners are reporting how cost of living pressures have added to existing issues such as mental health, loneliness, poor living conditions, fuel poverty, respiratory health, diet and malnutrition. Examples include;
- Skipping, missing or attempting to prioritise prescriptions from households not entitled to free prescriptions.
- Correlations between health conditions and poverty - lead poisoning in areas of the city with poor housing stock, attributable to children ingesting peeled paint from old pipes as well as recurrent and severe scabies, as families have been unable to afford deep clean/hot washing necessary to successfully treat the condition.
- Increasing numbers of patients with malnutrition; unable to access hot meals except for takeaway food due to the cost of food and energy. Particularly prevalent in areas densely populated by fast food takeaways offering cheap but nutritionally poor meals.

Crime & Community Safety

- Currently, more offenders without prior convictions and offending to protect or to provide for family – representing a change in local offender demographics.
- Elevated concerns and increased risks identified include exploitation (particularly women and young people), domestic abuse, child abuse, mental health incidents, and substance & alcohol misuse
- The Illegal Money Lending Team have reported Increases in illegal lending, linked to the cost of living, in conjunction with the decline of high-cost options.
- Concerns and increasing issues include illegal lending in workplaces, online lending via social media & gambling sites, individuals posing as legitimate lenders, use of tracking software on victim's phones, use of violence as enforcement.