

Best City Ambition – 2024 update initial proposals

Date: 13 December 2023

Report of: Director of Strategy and Resources

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

This report asks Executive Board to endorse the initial proposals for an update of the Leeds Best City Ambition, and to begin the formal consultation process as set out in the council's constitution.

The Best City Ambition sets out a strategic intent shared between the council and its partners, to work together as Team Leeds focused on tackling poverty and inequality and improving quality of life for everyone in Leeds. The update is being undertaken at a time of significant financial challenge when the need to maximise the positive impact of limited resources is more important than ever. The updated Ambition will provide a renewed framework for partners and communities in the city to work towards together, with a clear direction and set of priorities drawn from a wider set of strategies and plans, but articulated clearly through our interrelated three pillars – health and wellbeing, inclusive growth and zero carbon.

The report reflects on progress to date, details the key changes made as part of the update, and provides an initial overview of the engagement that has been undertaken so far. If approved by Executive Board, public consultation will follow with the Ambition being consulted on as part of this year's budget consultation – recognising the importance of maintaining ambition for the city and its communities even as the council, like other partners, needs to reduce budgets significantly. Final proposals will be received by the Board in February 2024.

Recommendations

Executive Board is recommended to:

- a) Consider the Best City Ambition initial proposals and approve commencement of public consultation.
- b) Refer the Best City Ambition initial proposals to Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board for consideration.
- c) Note the Director of Strategy and Resources will, following consultation, be responsible for production of the final Best City Ambition update proposals, scheduled to be received by the Board in February 2024.

What is this report about?

- 1 This report asks Executive Board to endorse the initial proposals for the update of the Leeds Best City Ambition and agree to release these for public consultation. It also asks Executive Board to refer the proposals to the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board for consideration, as required by the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules.
- 2 The Best City Ambition was adopted in 2022 to replace the previous Best Council Plan. It marked a clearer recognition in overall strategy and business planning that many of the council's ambitions were not things it could deliver alone, and effective partnership working was more important than ever. These themes had been visible in the Best Council Plan, but the shift more explicitly signified a strategic intent to embrace and plan ahead with Team Leeds at the forefront of a clear set of shared priorities for the city. Leeds's experience responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the lessons learned from the strength seen in partnership and community-based responses was an important driver in pursuing the city-focused approach in through the Best City Ambition.
- 3 Since its adoption, the Ambition has been embraced by colleagues within the council and partners across the city. The council's LGA Peer Challenge conducted in November 2022 recognised the progress seen even after only a short period, commenting:
 - a) "Partners, stakeholders and staff understand and have a collective ownership of these ambitions."
 - b) "There is widespread buy-in externally to the council's ambitions for the city and to its values, which are readily discussed in an unprompted way by staff, councillors, partners and community groups."
 - c) "The evolution from Best Council Plan to the Best City Ambition... has been a powerful way of galvanising partners across the city at a time of less resource".
- 4 The third comment above is of particular relevance to this update of the Ambition, which takes place at a time when the council's own financial challenge is significant, with other organisations in the city experiencing similar circumstances, and individual people and families continuing to deal with the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. The update seeks to refresh and refine the approach and priorities the Ambition sets out, ensuring they are streamlined to align with updated Health and Wellbeing and Inclusive Growth Strategies, but also with the priorities for other organisations, services and communities which are crucial to their delivery.
- 5 The rationale for maintaining and updating the Best City Ambition remains consistent, with prioritisation and clarity of direction key to navigating financial constraints. It is focused on tackling poverty and inequality; responding to changing circumstances in our economy, society and environment; setting out a strategic intent and direction of travel around which partners in the city can convene to maximise their resources and impact; and drawing together a compelling vision for Leeds's future to support a range of activities including seeking to bring additional investment and funding into the city.

What impact will this proposal have?

- 6 The initial draft proposals, attached at Appendix 1, recognise the very challenging financial climate which the council and its partners are operating in. They reaffirm that the Best City Ambition is not a corporate strategy or delivery plan, instead it describes a strategic intent shared by partners and communities for the kind of city we want Leeds to be. The Ambition is long-term and aspirational but is rooted in meaningful activity and progress we see on the ground today.
- 7 Based on feedback since the Ambition was adopted, this update aims to evolve and refine rather than overhaul its contents, reflecting the progress made to date and the dynamically

changing landscape in which we operate. The proposals continue to be based around the interrelated three pillars of health and wellbeing, inclusive growth and zero carbon – underpinned and enabled by the Team Leeds approach. This framework has strengthened further over recent years and enjoys strong understanding and support from city partners as well as elected members and staff within the council.

- 8 A summary of the key updates contained in Appendix 1 is outlined below. The report proposed for February 2024, which will contain final proposals, will also assess any equality, diversity, cohesion and integration implications of the Best City Ambition update.
- a) **Developing Team Leeds** – based on feedback, the principles which describe what it means to work as Team Leeds have been updated so they both better reflect the key issues which are important in achieving effective partnership working and supporting everyone in Leeds to play their part; but also so they are written in language which more people will identify with and understand, in plain English as far as possible. These changes will help to build on the already existing strong ownership that's felt across Leeds of the idea of Team Leeds. They are now more reflective of key areas of collaboration such as the Third Sector's leadership around social value, the further developments around private sector civic engagement and responsible business leadership with the launch of Leeds Business Anchors, and the exiting work to promote the city's innovation agenda through initiatives like the Innovation Arc – to name just three. These renewed Team Leeds principles should help everyone to understand what they can do to contribute in their own way, and provide a shared set of expectations we can have of one another as organisations and communities work together in the future.
 - b) **Explaining our partnerships** – alongside updating the principles above, new information has been added to summarise some of the key partnership arrangements which will help to drive the Best City Ambition forward. While these are wide-ranging and numerous, the document highlights and promotes the role of the three Anchor groups – the longstanding Leeds Inclusive Anchors made up primarily of key public sector partners alongside a small number of anchor businesses; the newly launched Leeds Business Anchors; and the community-led Leeds Community Anchors Network.
 - c) **Updating the Three Pillars** – recent weeks have seen the launch of a new Inclusive Growth Strategy and a new Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Best City Ambition is to be updated to align with the new underpinning framework as well as in response to feedback over recent months. While some of the wording has been improved to adopt plain English, most of the changes are relatively small. Some of the key issues which have been brought out more strongly in this revised version include: the importance of every child having the best start in life and the right to play; Leeds' ambition to be a mentally healthy city; the role of local high streets in creating sustainable economic growth and good jobs; energy efficiency for both environmental benefit and to support lower energy bills; helping people to be able to switch to lower carbon alternatives in their daily lives; and recognising the importance of biodiversity alongside the carbon reduction agenda.
 - d) **Measuring progress** – the importance of strengthening the approach to progress monitoring, the Best City Ambition is a key priority in the update, and something which community committees in particular have consistently raised as an area for improvement. This gap will now be addressed through the inclusion of arrangements covering the Leeds Joint Strategic Assessment, the Leeds Social Progress Index, and community engagement. More detail is outlined in paragraph 22 below. Other relevant initiatives which are contributing to efforts to tackle poverty and inequality, such as Leeds becoming a Marmot City, are also proposed to be incorporated into the Ambition.
 - e) **Showcasing Team Leeds in Action** – when scoping this update, it was clear there were opportunities to demonstrate the potential of the Team Leeds approach though showcasing some of the many examples of Leeds leading the way. Through doing this we can enable

sharing of best practice within the city as well as promoting what Leeds is achieving regionally, nationally and internationally. The draft updated Ambition includes a range of short spotlights shining a light on great work, and will in time link through to an online space where more case studies can be shared. The examples cited are diverse in nature drawn from a range of sources including partner contributions.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

9 The Best City Ambition is structured around the three pillars, and the update reflects the latest versions of key supporting strategies. The initial proposals update the Ambition statements which set out the vision for Leeds in each of these three areas and refine the underpinning priorities too. The intersection between the three pillars is emphasised further in this update and evidenced in some of the case study examples included.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: All

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

10 A significant amount and diverse range of predominantly informal consultation and engagement has taken place to date to inform the initial proposals attached at Appendix 1. Those involved in engagement to inform the update to date have included:

- Council committees – including Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board and nine of the ten community committees (Outer West scheduled to follow).
- Voluntary and community sector – including the Leeds Community Anchors Network, Third Sector Leeds leadership group and a range of individuals and small groups.
- Children and young people – through attendance at the Leeds Youth Council working group event at the Tetley.
- Staff groups – including the council’s staff networks and policy network.
- Public and private sector partners – including through the Inclusive Anchors Network, networks with researchers at the city’s universities, and communications issued to key partners from the Leader of Council and Chief Executive.

11 Existing knowledge, views and insight gained from other recent engagement activities, for example around the new Health and Wellbeing and Inclusive Growth strategies, has also been used to inform the initial proposals.

12 This paper now seeks Executive Board approval to release the consultation draft for public consultation as required by the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules as part of the council’s constitution. This formal consultation will be delivered primarily online, although the wider programme of face-to-face engagement with partners, community forums and other stakeholders will continue alongside. The public consultation will run from 13 December for around four weeks alongside the Budget Consultation.

What are the resource implications?

13 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

14 Resource allocation in support of the council's own efforts to pursue the priorities set out in the Best City Ambition, and other supporting strategies and plans, will be aligned through the medium term financial strategy and annual budget within the financial envelope available.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

15 The council's risk and performance frameworks have been reviewed and updated to account for the adoption of the Best City Ambition and have been recently considered again by the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee. There are no direct risk implications arising from this report.

16 Clear communication about the role and purpose of the Best City Ambition has always been important, but perhaps more so at a time of significant financial challenge. Significant attention has been given, and will continue, to ensure any softer risks around expectations are handled effectively, as is discussed throughout this report and in the initial proposals at Appendix 1.

What are the legal implications?

17 In accordance with the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 the council has determined that the Best City Ambition is of such significant that it should be included in the Budget and Policy Framework (B&PF) and be subject to adoption by Full Council. In November 2021, Full Council resolved to approve the necessary constitutional amendments to facilitate this.

18 The Best City Ambition update is therefore being prepared in accordance with the B&PF procedure rules, including consultation with the public and referral of the initial proposals to Scrutiny, consideration of representation received is scheduled to be made in January 2024. In light of these reasons, this report is not eligible for Call In in line with Executive and Decision Making Procedure Rule 5.1.2.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

19 Consideration was given to not updating the Best City Ambition, but given the progress made since its adoption and the refreshed Health and Wellbeing and Inclusive Growth strategies now in place, Executive Board previously agreed this was not appropriate and agreed to an update at its meeting in September 2023.

How will success be measured?

20 There are many existing routes through which progress towards the Best City Ambition is regularly monitored and reported. These include a range of annual reports, updates on health and wellbeing, inclusive growth and climate change, Equality Improvement Priorities, strategy updates and monitoring such as the regular child poverty strategy reports to Executive Board, and over the last two years has also included regular updates on work to respond to the cost-of-living crisis. This list is not exhaustive and while there is a huge amount of activity undertaken, to date this has not been suitably reflected in the Best City Ambition itself and can be difficult to navigate.

21 The initial proposals at Appendix 1 therefore more clearly articulate how progress on the Best City Ambition will be monitored. There are four main components of this monitoring framework:

- a) **Leeds Joint Strategic Assessment (JSA)** – statutory city analysis undertaken every three years and covering the widest set of health determinants. The JSA provides an opportunity to look in details and areas of progress and challenge covering themes including the economy,

health and wellbeing, environment and climate change, housing, transport and mobility, early start and education, and more. The next JSA will be published in 2024.

- b) **Leeds Social Progress Index (SPI)** – adopted earlier this year the Leeds SPI, developed alongside the global non-profit Social Progress Imperative, was created to help the city measure progress on Inclusive Growth and a broad view of factors affecting this. The SPI can help us to understand progress at a local ward level across its three domains: basic human needs, foundations of wellbeing, and opportunity. An updated version of the SPI will be published soon.
- c) **Community engagement** – other components can provide high quality data and insight to monitor the success of efforts to pursue the Best City Ambition, but data alone is not enough. It is clear this must be complemented by listening to the voices of citizens and communities in Leeds and understanding their lived experience. The principles in the Best City Ambition set out a clear commitment to do this in a meaningful way.
- d) **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in supporting strategies and plans** – detailed delivery plans and key performance indicators are in place for the range of supporting plans and strategies that will continue to sit beneath the City Ambition and accountability for monitoring and managing these falls within existing governance arrangements which are often already rooted in partnership. Executive Board, scrutiny boards and Corporate Governance and Audit Committee also receive regular updates on the council's performance against the agreed KPIs.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

- 22 Should Executive Board agree the recommendations in this report, public consultation will commence in December 2023 and close in early-January 2024. It is envisaged Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board will consider the proposals at its meeting in January 2024. The final proposals are scheduled to be received by Executive Board in February 2024, before being referred to Full Council later the same month.
- 23 Looking forward, it is expected the Best City Ambition would be reviewed ordinarily on a three-yearly cycle to follow publication of the most recent Leeds Joint Strategic Assessment. On that basis, the next review would take place in 2027.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Leeds Best City Ambition – initial proposals consultation draft

Background papers

None.