

Best City Ambition – 2024 update

Date: 21st February 2024

Report of: Director of Strategy and Resources

Report to: Council

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 Full Council to accept the Executive Board's recommendation and adopt the updated Best City Ambition as part of the council's Budget and Policy Framework. This report also asks Full Council to agree to delete the Vision for Leeds from the council's Budget and Policy Framework, given the adoption of the updated Best City Ambition.

The Best City Ambition sets out a strategic intent shared between the council and its partners to work together as Team Leeds. Its purpose is to set out the vision for the future of Leeds, focussed on tackling poverty and inequality and improving quality of life for everyone across the whole city. The priorities set out within the Ambition remain focussed on the three interrelated pillars of Health and Wellbeing, Inclusive Growth and Zero Carbon.

This report gives background to the Best City Ambition update, with an overview of the key changes that have been proposed. The report also summarises the approach taken and next steps to adopt the proposed changes. Further documents are also included as appendices to support this report, including a report attached as Appendix 2 to detail the engagement and consultation that has taken place to inform the update.

Recommendations

Full Council is recommended to:

- a) Adopt the updated Best City Ambition, as attached as Appendix 1, as part of the council's Budget and Policy Framework.
- b) Note that graphic design work will continue to be developed prior to publication of the updated Best City Ambition around 1st April 2024, which may include some amendments to wording.
- c) Note the Director of Strategy and Resources will be responsible for implementing this decision.
- d) Agree to delete the Vision for Leeds from the Budget and Policy Framework at Part 2, Article 4.1(i) of the council's constitution given the adoption of the Best City Ambition replaces it and there is no longer being a statutory requirement for the council to maintain a Sustainable Community Strategy.

What is this report about?

- 1 On 7th February 2023, Executive Board endorsed the updated Best City Ambition and recommended to Full Council that it adopts the updated Best City Ambition. Background to the decisions to update the Best City Ambition and to the content of this report are available [here \(December 2023 Executive Board\)](#) and [here \(September 2023 Executive Board\)](#). This report asks Full Council to accept Executive Board's recommendation and adopt the updated Leeds Best City Ambition, found at Appendix 1, as part of the council's Budget and Policy Framework.
- 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 through a Team Leeds approach was more important than ever. There was acknowledgement that when the Best City Ambition was adopted, there would need to be a transitional period to move towards the revised approach and to continue to engage with partners, and that priorities would need to be kept under regular review.
- 3 Since its adoption, the Ambition has been embraced by colleagues within the council and partners across the city. As previously reported, the council's LGA Peer Challenge conducted in November 2022 recognised the progress seen even after only a short period of the Best City Ambition introduction, including the following comment:
 - a) *"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 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. In line with efforts to continuously improve, the update is also informed by the latest performance monitoring and city analysis, ensuring it is focused on the right priorities for the future.
- 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.
- 6 In 2011, the council adopted the Vision for Leeds which similarly set out a range of priorities and desired city outcomes. Many of the key themes from that old Vision are also reflected, in their current form, in the Best City Ambition. At the time, the Vision for Leeds fulfilled the council's statutory duty to prepare and maintain a Sustainable Community Strategy, and as such it was integrated into the council's constitution as part of the Budget and Policy Framework. The statutory duty to prepare a Sustainable Community Strategy was repealed by Section 100 of the Deregulation Act 2015. Although not a statutory document, the Best City Ambition supersedes the Vision for Leeds, and Council is therefore recommended to delete the Vision for Leeds from the Budget and Policy Framework.

What impact will this proposal have?

- 7 As acknowledged in the initial draft Best City Ambition update and accompanying report, which was considered by Executive Board in December 2023, the update proposals are brought forward within the context of significant financial challenges that are being faced by the council and key partners. The impact of the initial draft proposals was considered in the report [here](#)

[\(December 2023\)](#) in paragraphs 6-8. The final proposals, attached at Appendix 1, continue to recognise the difficult financial climate that the council and partners are operating in. The challenge of the cost of living crisis in Leeds, with families, communities and local organisations all feeling the impact, is a good example of where the Team Leeds approach set out in the Ambition can help us support each other to manage the immediate pressures and work together to build for the future.

- 8 It should again be noted 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. Given the challenging climate that the council, our partners and members of the public are navigating, it is more important than ever that we share a strong vision across the city, remaining ambitious whilst maximising the positive impact of limited resources across the city.
- 9 A summary of key update themes within the initial draft proposals was considered within the Executive Board report in December 2023 as highlighted above. The key update themes within the final proposed updated Best City Ambition found at Appendix 1 have remained the same, with most amendments based on consultation feedback being made to language to better articulate key messages. Overall, feedback since December has been very positive with only minimal further suggestions for strengthening or amendment being received. Comments from the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board are attached at Appendix 4 and have informed the final draft proposed in this report. The extensive engagement that took place before the initial proposals were drafted has played a significant part in reaching this point. The key areas considered as part of the update have been:
 - a) **Developing Team Leeds** – updated Team Leeds principles in more plain English to help everyone to understand how they can play their part. This has included strengthening points around community power, strengths-based approaches, social responsibility and the importance of being a kind and neighbourly city.
 - b) **Explaining our partnerships** - summarising some of the key partnership arrangements which will help to drive the Best City Ambition forward. This includes setting out some of the key supporting strategies which underpin the Ambition, and their governance arrangements.
 - c) **Updating the Three Pillar priorities** - in response to updated key strategies across the city and feedback received through ongoing consultation and engagement.
 - d) **Measuring progress** - clearer articulation of how we measure success, including through a new Best City Ambition Scorecard which will draw on the Leeds Social Progress Index and prioritising citizen voice and community engagement – understanding real life perspectives, which add richness and context to what the data alone can tell us. The Leeds Joint Strategic Assessment will continue to provide an opportunity to draw this breadth of analysis together and understand potential future implications on a three-yearly cycle.
 - e) **Showcasing Team Leeds in Action** – a range of short “spotlights” to showcase some of the best examples of Team Leeds approaches delivering innovative and meaningful work, and to demonstrate some of the key demographics and statistics across the city, in particular relating to the mission to tackle poverty and inequality.
 - f) **Adjusted language** – to ensure that our Ambition is inclusive and meaningful across all partners and people, from all areas of Leeds, so that everyone can be involved. This has also included stronger reflection of the unique geography that makes up Leeds, including the urban city centre, local towns and villages and more rural areas.
- 10 Any implications to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration as a result of the proposed updates to the Best City Ambition have been considered in the report attached as Appendix 3.

Next steps

- 11 We will continue to promote the Best City Ambition across the whole city, as a vision for tackling poverty and inequality and improving the quality of life for everyone here. We will strengthen ownership of the Team Leeds approach by encouraging and supporting more city partners to embed it within their own organisational strategies and priorities.
- 12 The Best City Ambition will continue to set the context for the council's own work, providing a framework of key priorities for the city to work towards and approaches to work within. For example, this could include (but is not limited to) how we tackle our financial challenge, the Community Committee review, our communications and inward investment to the city.
- 13 We will continue to use the Best City Ambition to frame conversations with people across the city, including partner organisations, residents and communities in line with the Team Leeds approach. Within the public consultation, almost all respondents (91%) agreed that is important for them to be involved in shaping decisions that impact their local area, however just over half of these (56%) agreed that they feel able to share ideas and solutions to local problems (52% of all respondents). This indicates that to realise the full potential of Team Leeds, making the principles set out around community power and strengths-based approaches as impactful as possible, we should continue to build on and beyond existing work to support local people and communities to be more engaged to get involved and play their full part. There are a range of opportunities to take this action forward, including through the ongoing review of Community Committees.
- 14 As the nature of the Best City Ambition is ongoing, we will keep our priorities under review, and actively monitor our progress and performance towards these shared goals to ensure we are measuring its success appropriately.

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

Health and Wellbeing Inclusive Growth Zero Carbon

- 15 The Best City Ambition is the document which sets out the three pillars framework, and the update reflects the latest versions of key supporting strategies. The final 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

- 16 A significant amount and diverse range of consultation and engagement has taken place to inform the proposed updates to the Best City Ambition, as detailed in Appendix 2. A summary of key updates to the Best City Ambition following consultation feedback are listed above in paragraph 9.
- 17 In December 2023, following approval from Executive Board, the draft updated Best City Ambition document was released for public consultation, as required by the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules as part of the council's constitution. This also included referring the initial proposals to Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board, comments from which are attached at Appendix 4.

- 18 This period of formal public consultation took place primarily online from 13th December 2023 to 10th January 2024, through short series of questions included within the wider Budget Consultation 2024-25 survey. The questions focussed on Team Leeds – asking about people’s involvement in local communities, the importance of the headline priorities contained within the Best City Ambition, and an open question about other priorities or further comments. A total of 1,722 completed responses to the survey were received. Details of the public consultation, including a summary of responses, can be found in Appendix 2.
- 19 Wider face-to-face consultation and engagement with partners, community forums and other stakeholders has also continued to take place alongside the formal public consultation. Building on previous reports to Executive Board, key messages from this engagement are briefly outlined in Appendix 2. To summarise, some of the key engagement taken place to inform the update has included:
- Council committees – including Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board and Community Committees.
 - 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 and through engagement with key colleagues
 - Staff groups – including the council’s staff networks.
 - 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.
- 20 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 update.
- 21 Going forward, engagement on the updated Best City Ambition will continue to take place through Team Leeds approaches, including our established and developing networks and forums, progress monitoring, and community engagement, as articulated in the measuring progress section of the Ambition itself. As highlighted in paragraph 14, the nature of the Best City Ambition is ongoing and requires active conversations across the whole city to strengthen its success.

What are the resource implications?

- 22 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.
- 23 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. The budget and MTFs for 2024-25 was also considered by Executive Board on 7 February and is on this Full Council agenda, and the Best City Ambition has been used to set the context for the council’s response to the Financial Challenge.

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

- 24 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.

25 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 risks around clear communication and expectations are handled effectively, as is discussed throughout this report and in the final proposals at Appendix 1.

What are the legal implications?

26 In accordance with the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 the council has determined that the Best City Ambition is of such significance 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.

27 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 proposals to Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board. The period of public consultation has now closed, and the proposals were considered by Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board on 15 January 2024. Proposals falling within the B&PF are not eligible for Call In in line with Executive and Decision Making Procedure Rule 5.1.2.

28 As set out in paragraph 6 above, the recommendation to delete the Vision for Leeds from the council's Budget and Policy Framework is made possible due to the repeal of the statutory duty to prepare a Sustainable Community Strategy as part of the Deregulation Act 2015.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

29 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?

30 Initial proposed details of how progress would be measured were considered at Executive Board in December 2023, which can be found at paragraphs 20 and 21 in the report [here \(December 2023\)](#). The report acknowledged that there are many existing routes in which progress towards the Best City Ambition is regularly monitored and reported. Whilst there has been a large amount of activity undertaken to date around progress measuring, this has not previously been suitably reflected in the Best City Ambition itself, and it can be difficult to navigate the vast amount of information and options available.

31 The final proposals at Appendix 1 therefore more clearly articulate how progress on the Best City Ambition will be monitored. At a headline level, key metrics will be compiled in a balanced scorecard and reported at least once per year through the council's Annual Performance Report. The scorecard will focus on those issues which sit at the intersection of the pillars and our overarching ambition, and will sit on top of the wealth of rich data and citizen insights which will be made more accessible through further development of the Leeds Observatory platform. This underpinning monitoring framework has two main component parts:

- a) **Leeds Social Progress Index (SPI)** – to help understand progress at a local ward level. The SPI will also contribute to the new cross-cutting Marmot City Indicators currently being developed.

b) **Community Voice** – listening to the voices of citizens and communities in Leeds and understanding their lived experience, and where appropriate maximising opportunities to do this through our key partners.

32 Further to the above, detailed delivery plans and key performance indicators are monitored through supporting strategies and plans, with existing governance arrangements in place. All of the progress monitoring information will be brought together, unpacked in more detail and promoted through the Leeds Joint Strategic Assessment (JSA) which is undertaken every three years.

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

33 If the recommendations to Full Council are agreed, 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.

34 The Director of Strategy and Resources will be responsible for next steps and adoption of the updated Best City Ambition.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Leeds Best City Ambition – final proposals
- Appendix 2: Leeds Best City Ambition – Consultation and Engagement summary report
- Appendix 3: Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration (EDCI) screening
- Appendix 4: Leeds Best City Ambition – Summary of Scrutiny Board Responses

Background papers

None.