

Foreword

Learning lessons from Covid-19 in Leeds

Learning lessons from the pandemic is crucial, for organisations and individuals to reflect on their experience. We owe it to those who've tragically lost their lives through the pandemic, as well as to everyone who has worked so hard on such a sustained basis.

We appreciate the time partners across the city have taken to reflect and provide feedback to help with this review, including the partner survey that was conducted at a similar time (Annex 3 of this document). The overwhelming feedback was positive with so many people taking pride in the Covid-19 response and recovery activity and feedback about the extensive communications activity. Inevitably, there were also things that we could do better in the future, so we have recommendations to progress.

The [response and recovery plan](#), first published in March 2020, has been regularly updated with published reports at every Council [Executive Board](#) meeting, and the communications activity for Covid-19 across all partners, councillors, MPs and the public has been extensive.

As a city, we have so much to be proud of with the way individuals, businesses, communities and the multi-agency arrangements worked to help achieve the ambitions of the response and recovery plan, with the Leeds values demonstrated through #TeamLeeds and #TogetherLeeds. The pace, intensity, unpredictability, and length of the pandemic has been unique, with many people facing the biggest challenge of their lives. Whilst the arrangements were of a "command and control" nature to ensure a systematic response, they were also very fluid (given the sustained nature of the pandemic) and empowering to ensure both a top down and a bottom up approach, one based on culture, behaviour and relationships rather than bureaucracy. Feedback suggests that the level of trust across the partnership has been strong, driven by a "collective will to do the right thing" and a willingness of organisations to work beyond organisational boundaries: "the people best placed to do a job just got on with it and did it".

The findings can be summarised as overall very positive with effective relationships being strengthened through Covid-19, with one respondent describing the arrangements as contributing to the "most positive outcomes possible under the circumstances". The information sharing, use of intelligence and delivery activity were very positive, especially to understand what other groups were doing and to make connections. There was inevitably some duplication across meetings and the response did require a lot of meetings. Generally, the sense was that the right people were on the right groups, and the third sector presence across the arrangements was very positive.

We have conducted this review on behalf of the multi-agency arrangements, to learn lessons for handling future incidents and challenges in the city and crucially to harness the strength of joint working to further improve how we all work together to achieve the city's ambitions. We are proud of the council's own response too, as are other individual partners rightly proud, be that statutory, community, faith, and business partners.

We've set out some clear recommendations from the review that we will pursue, monitor, and report progress through the council's Executive Board. These are particularly about capitalising on the deepening and broadening of relationships that Covid-19 has brought to deliver the city's ambitions, and about raising awareness of how multi-agency arrangements work.

Thank you for everything you have done to contribute to the city's Covid-19 response, as we continue to respond and recover from the pandemic.

Tom Riordan

Chair Leeds Strategic Coordinating Group (Gold SCG)

Chief Executive, Leeds City Council

Leeds Covid-19 multi-agency response: learning lessons – Executive Summary

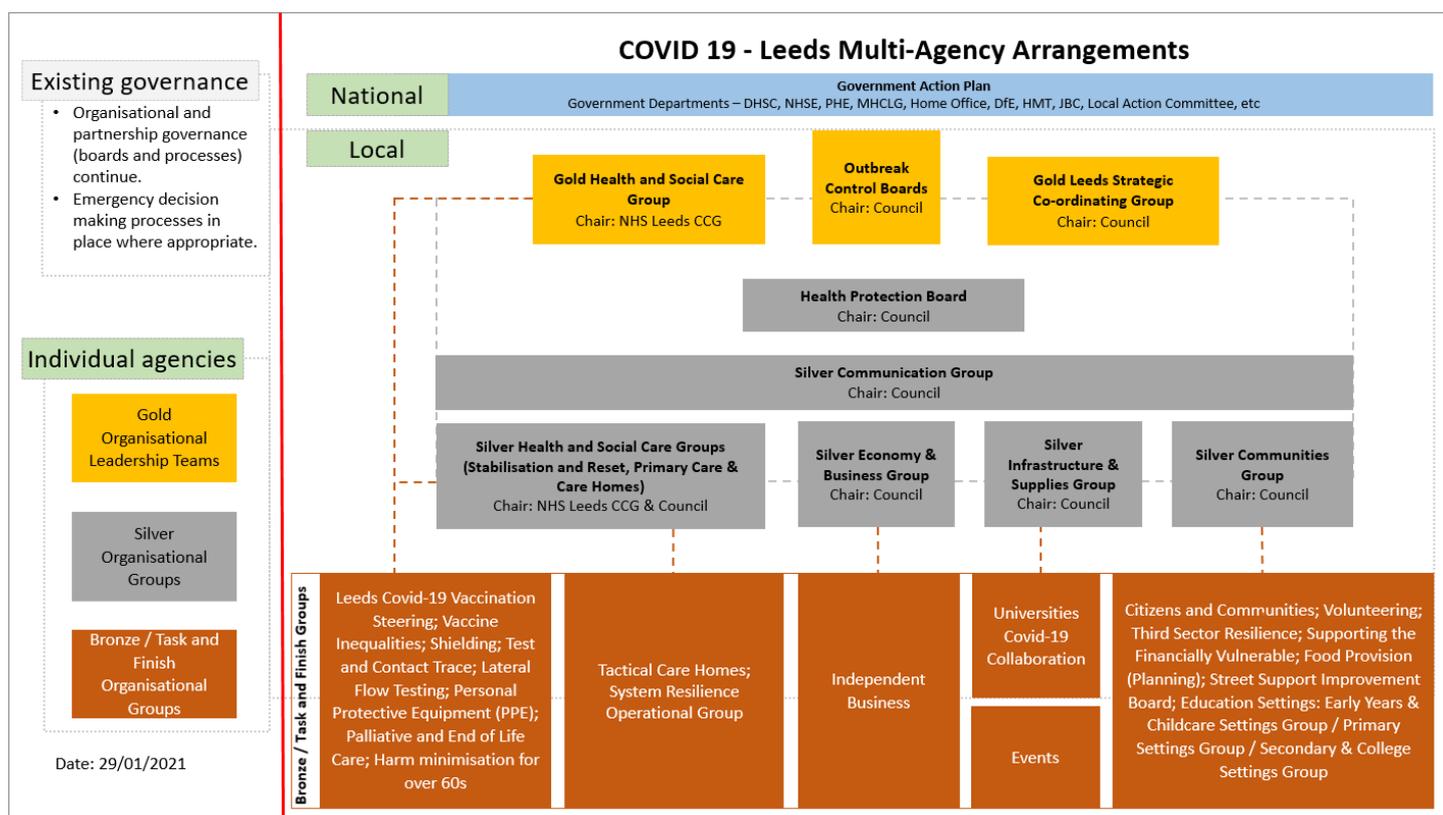
Background and purpose

The Covid-19 pandemic was a true test of our city’s emergency resilience response and recovery, a very different kind of incident to normal where we typically see a short response phase and a clearer path into recovery. We’ve never before faced such an all-encompassing, significant and protracted challenge. All partners in the city worked together, often in rapidly changing and unpredictable circumstances, coordinating and communicating with partners in West Yorkshire, Yorkshire and the Humber, Core Cities and national organisations.

More than a year has passed, with too many lives and livelihoods either lost or impacted, so we are determined to reflect and learn to understand how the city’s multiagency arrangements worked during the pandemic. The purpose of the learning lessons review was twofold:

- improve our handling of any future incidents or emergencies the city faces
- harness the incredible capability and capacity we have in the city to have the strongest recovery to help achieve the city’s ambitions, especially on inequalities.

The focus was understanding how those working in the multi-agency arrangements (Gold, Silver and Bronze groups) felt the arrangements served the purpose to deliver the [response and recovery plan](#) first published in March 2020. Regular monitoring reports have been [published](#) along with dashboards, with the overall plan regularly updated. The [local outbreak management plan](#) was at the heart of this plan, a national requirement, and crucially involving local councillors to support their communities. Here is a diagrammatic representation of the multi-agency arrangements that has been used throughout the pandemic.



Methodology

The approach to the learning lessons review was agreed through the Strategic Coordinating Group (Gold), as good practice in any incident. Some organisations have also undertaken their own exercises, which is welcomed and encouraged. At a high level, the approach was to ask two key questions:

- what worked well in the multi-agency arrangements
- what could have worked better.

Feedback was sought about these questions, with an optional more detailed proforma (available at Annex 1), with the team also offering interviews or visits to multi-agency meetings to capture feedback from discussions. There were more than 30 written email responses and discussions with about 10 of the multi-agency groups, combined with extensive informal feedback through conversations or emails, including from councillors and MPs. The responses came from right across the system, including health and social care, the third sector, HR, cleaning and catering services, along with other services such as legal, infrastructure and higher education.

This report is based on an analysis of these responses, with the findings developed from cross referencing the responses, followed by a discussion the Strategic Coordinating Group (Gold) and shared in draft across partners. This report deliberately describes the process about responding to the pandemic rather than detailed specific aspects of the response and recovery plan, which is all covered in the regular Executive Board reports.

Additionally, a partner survey was undertaken to seek views from a broader set of partners less directly involved in the multi-agency arrangements but making an important contribution to the city's response and recovery efforts. This survey asked questions about communications, how the council had responded during the pandemic and how easy it was to do business with the council. Responses were largely positive, albeit suggestions were made as to how the council could improve in its work with partners, which has been shared with senior officers for their consideration. The findings of the survey are presented at the end of this document at Annex 3.

Summary of findings

- Overall feedback was very positive, reflecting that the multi-agency arrangements have been very effective and relationships between people, organisations and with the public have been strengthened.
- There were inspiring stories that made a real difference to those suffering in the pandemic, including those shielding and at the end of life, as well as small, medium and large businesses being supported.
- Structure and approach perceived to have worked well, with one response saying the arrangements in place contributed to the "most positive outcomes possible under the circumstances".
- Arrangements were crucial to deliver the response and recovery plan, share information, discuss issues arising, drive actions quickly and monitor impact.
- Dashboards were welcomed as part of the intelligence picture, although these could have been more readily available online and could be more integrated in future.
- Positive feedback about understanding other parts of the system, although more to do to be explicit about communicating this.
- Very high frequency of meetings at the start, with some perceived duplication across groups, including having two Gold groups.
- Whilst there was extensive communications and updates, there wasn't always clear feedback between groups to ensure shared understanding and to minimise duplication.
- Feedback that generally the right people were on the right groups, with the third sector valuing being involved in groups and their contribution being valued by others. Groups were well led, with membership adapted where required, and evolved in terms of frequency and focus to meet the changing demands of the pandemic.
- A lot of people learned quickly about command and control multi-agency arrangements, and the pandemic will improve our response to future incidents, although more could have been done to increase awareness of that approach earlier.

- Positive feedback about communications from the council to the broad set of partners during the pandemic – 98% felt that pandemic-related information from the council was useful and most felt that cross-sector working is faster and more effective than before.

Recommendations

- Use a similar approach to publish a response and recovery plan in any future scenario, together with a clear diagrammatic representation of Gold/Silver/Bronze groups to provide clarity that the right people are involved in the right groups, and **so that everyone understands how the system is working and who to contact for information.**
- Use the opportunity to **refresh the city's major emergency plans** to exercise these plans and ensure a good understanding of how Gold/Silver/Bronze multi-agency arrangements can be used to best effect.
- Use the data and intelligence group who have produced the Gold Dashboard (and potentially the new Office of Data Analytics) to consider what improvements could be made to **streamline and simplify intelligence gathering and reporting** so that information is available to all group members at the right time.
- Ensure communications are explicit that they are covering developments across the multi-agency structure, and that these are **more systematically shared across the partnership and signpost to more detailed information**, with all colleagues taking responsibility for communication and sharing of information where there are opportunities to do so
- **All partners implement their own lessons learnt** to inform changes that would benefit the wider system.
- All groups consider on an ongoing basis whether meetings continue to have value in a business as usual context, or can be dissolved.
- Harness the broadening and deepening of relationships developed through Covid-19 to ensure the **strongest possible recovery from the pandemic**, maximising the opportunity offered by the **Integrated Care Partnership** and developing a **City Plan** to drive a set of shared outcomes.

Annex 1 - Leeds Covid-19 multi-agency response: learning lessons – Detailed Findings

Structure of multi-agency arrangements

- Some issues raised about potential duplication in the structure- city gold/HSC Gold, meaning that discussions repeated in different groups, although people also recognised the value in this to get the important situational awareness and key messages well understood.
- Sometimes many of the same people attended multiple different meetings, whereas others commented that it would have been beneficial to have greater overlap between groups. A more systematic and single support system to the multi-agency arrangements could have been beneficial, but probably wasn't practical.
- The Bronze Outbreak Control Group reported that some duplication across the themes became an issue as areas of work were progressed by other groups, however the group appreciated an overview of all the issues and worked with related groups to resolve the issues.
- The NHS System Resilience Operational Group reported that the relationship between multi-agency groups sometimes led to mixed responses with some very clear and some less clear.
- The link between groups was often strong and clear e.g. Silver care home and Health and Care Gold.
- The Council's Silver Organisational group worked well and members found it beneficial to have an overview across other areas, to be well informed and to resolve issues and ensure consistent communications.

Focus of the system

- Generally, respondents felt that the balance between response and recovery was right, with the Bronze Outbreak Plan group feeling that it worked well The group "continues to have a strong focus on outbreak plans across the system as the city enters into easing of restrictions."
- Other groups felt that the combined balance of response and recovery worked well, with one group stating that there was always "time available to discuss emerging issues such as visiting relatives and professionals".
- Some respondents felt that there should have been more focus on key themes, for example: sustaining mental health services, a clearer and more explicit focus on inequalities.
- Some respondents said it was sometimes a challenge to balance national and local requirements, but that these issues were generally worked through well.

Communication and information-sharing across the system

- Inevitably, there were mixed responses regarding how well communication worked across the system. Some felt that communication messages were shared quickly across multiple channels and appreciated this, whereas others struggled with the lines of engagement between silver and bronze groups.
- The majority of respondents felt that the process of feeding in and out between groups at different levels worked well and developed as the pandemic continued.
- Respondents were mainly positive about the regular written updates describing what was happening at Gold and across the system, with many using this for their own communication purposes. However, there was some evidence that these didn't reach everyone they needed to and some minor feedback that they weren't explicit enough about being from Gold.
- Although there were regular reports published and signposted including dashboards, monitoring risk and the summary of multi-agency groups, there was some feedback that this wasn't sufficiently visible.
- The dashboards were welcomed by many, but there was also a suggestion that situational awareness could have been more systematically gathered and shared in a single source and at the right level of detail.
- Some groups have found the information sharing and collaborative communications invaluable and will be continuing post-pandemic e.g. transport infrastructure.
- Feedback suggested that the process of feeding in between groups "strengthened over time and as the groups matured and relationships developed, we got better at communicating across all levels. Establishing setting based working groups enabled us to develop robust systems cross unis, schools, care homes, vulnerable settings and workplaces."
- Microsoft Teams has been a useful tool to support engagement from a wide variety of partner organisations.

- The groups provided a useful means to reach particular audiences e.g. shielding or care homes etc.

Relationships

- An overall strong message came across that relationships between colleagues, agencies, organisations, and communities has strengthened.
- Almost all written response felt that relationships between the multi-agency groups was clear.
- The universities/HE group felt that relationships between universities and with Public Health and Community Safety have strengthened and will be valuable post pandemic, with a suggestion that “this partnership approach has helped to smooth potential community tensions at a very difficult time”.
- The level of trust put in partners from the beginning was reported to have been good and delivered better outcomes. This trust has been implicit, from the very beginning, driven by a “collective will to do the right thing”. There has been a willingness of organisations to work beyond organisational boundaries. “The people best placed to do a job just got on with it and did it”.
- Some groups reported that where colleagues had worked together before the pandemic, it helped in getting groups off the ground quickly. Conversely, there was an occasional report that it was difficult for people outside of the multi-agency groups to become involved, with the sense that ‘cliques’ had formed.
- Bringing partners together to identify issues and concerns has led to shared purpose and personal accountability of members to develop and implement action plans to support health and care providers. These relationships will support reset and recovery as we move out of the pandemic.
- While relationships were strengthened between colleagues working in different services/agencies, a negative side of this, for one respondent, was that managers had less time to spend with their own teams, particularly early in the response when there was a proliferation of meetings.

Representation on groups

- Most people felt that groups were well represented with the right individuals round the table to bring together knowledge across areas. People felt empowered to make decisions, one respondent from the Bronze harm minimisation group said: “No gaps identified by the group – members comment that it felt like all the system was represented. Particularly useful to have representation from GP clinical lead and representation from third sector and culturally diverse groups.”
- Similarly, the Bronze Health and Social Care Providers Group felt that they have had representation from all system partners.
- Another Bronze group agreed and felt that the response and recovery “was correct as we all attend a number of meetings and this information could then be fed into other meetings”.
- In some cases, there were gaps or people that should have been represented earlier: e.g. feedback that there should have had someone who was shielding involved in the CEV group to feedback first-hand experience; the LCC Silver Organisational group felt that trade union representation should have been in place from the beginning; in some cases the third sector were brought into groups later and should have been represented from the beginning; whereas some Communication colleagues felt that they were expected to attend a huge number of meetings, particularly at the start of the pandemic.
- Silver Care Homes was very much a listen and act leadership group around supporting care homes through the most challenging period for care homes with clear and excellent leadership and both Healthwatch Leeds and Carers Leeds involved directly.

Responsiveness and decision-making

- The multi-agency groups and strong partnership working were seen as proactive in identifying issues and addressing them at the earliest possible stage, with swift decision-making, for example, planning permission for the hospital to change space for parking was agreed by both LCC and Hospital colleagues quickly.

- The fact that the city has strong and well-established community-based infrastructure (including the third sector) was an asset that meant we weren't starting from scratch and had capacity and resource available to us. It was highlighted as important that this infrastructure is sustained, and sustainable, moving forward.
- Speaking with one voice as a group gave clarity of message, was a theme from some groups.
- Mixed feedback about the style of meetings across the system, with some reporting that a round robin information sharing worked well whilst others felt there should be more strategy and decision making, but the general feedback was that all groups got the job done! This was perhaps summed up by: "The Chair regularly sensed checked to ensure emerging priorities were covered and addressed and the agenda was very much shared".
- The Silver Care group felt that there was a very good Covid-19 response, to ensure that care homes were supported fully throughout with sufficiently high profile for care homes. Previously care homes have been a part of the health and care system that is often unheard and overlooked. The excellent senior level leadership of this meant it was very much focused on listen and act, with a definite focus on listening to all stakeholders.
- The pandemic has caused reflection on how we prepare for emergency situations. Before Covid-19, lots of preparation had been undertaken for emergency scenarios but this was probably underscored by an assumption that it would be very unlikely to happen. This may have influenced how plans were formed and how well they were engaged with. The experience of the pandemic has taught us that the worst-case scenario can happen.
- It was suggested that statistic sharing should be put into a central place rather than through one person.

Third Sector Role

- Third Sector organisations felt they were well represented at every level of the structure –in marked difference to reports from other cities.
- Third sector did very well at providing practical services on the ground, through community hubs and informally.
- The experience has helped raise the profile of the third sector and understanding of how connected the sector is to communities.
- Third Sector representatives have welcomed the responsive approach to the emergency – with a collaborative, 'sector blind' approach to shaping services.
- The pandemic experience has highlighted where there is duplication/overlap between different areas of the third sector, where there could be a more coherent approach with all working together as best as possible. There was a sense that all council agencies need to fully understand the scope of the third sector, particularly beyond the specialist health organisations and understand how, for example, sports or environmental organisations can also contribute to better health outcomes.
- Some felt that VAL should have more explicitly led all volunteering, whereas there was a mixed approach given the national approach as well.
- Echoing comments made by others in the system, some in the third sector reported that it was not always clear whether some areas of focus were designated 'Bronze' and some 'Silver' and it was not always clear what the decision making process, or line of reporting was.
- Some third sector reps felt that that it was not always clear which parts of the third sector were active in different parts of the system and that a single guide for where to turn to for help would have strengthened the city's response.
- Some contributors felt that the influence of the third sector was most effective at the more operational 'Bronze' level and that the opportunity to influence overarching strategy was more limited.
- That third sector key workers were prioritised for vaccination in the same way as any other key worker was greatly appreciated and demonstrated that the importance of the sector is recognised.

Legacy

During the review process colleagues identified several work areas that are likely to continue out of the pandemic to support better practice into the future. For example: the universities will continue to meet termly in the future to

coordinate student movement, community safety and liaison, and well-being; infrastructure will continue to collaborate on communications and messaging; care homes collaboration and communication will continue and a review of volunteering in the city is planned.

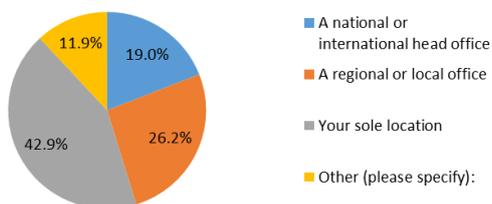
Annex 2 - Feedback proforma

Learning lessons from Covid response and recovery – Outline Review Questions

Name of Group- is this a bronze/silver/gold group?
How has the Covid response felt to you? Has your group met its objectives?
Have there been any gaps in representation in your group, or in the overall arrangements?
Were the themes of the response and recovery approach right? (<i>Outbreak Management, Health & Social Care (including Vaccination), Business & Economy, Citizens and Communities (including Education), Infrastructure & Supplies, Organisational Impacts, Communications & Media</i>)
Were we right to combine Response and Recovery? Have we given the right balance of attention to each?
Have the relationships between the multi-agency groups been clear? (see chart above)
Has the process of feeding in and out between groups at different levels worked?
Has the level of communication across the whole partnership been right?
Has the approach to reporting (monthly reports to the council's Executive Board, covering all elements of the response) been right?
Any other comments?

Annex 3- Partner Survey Findings

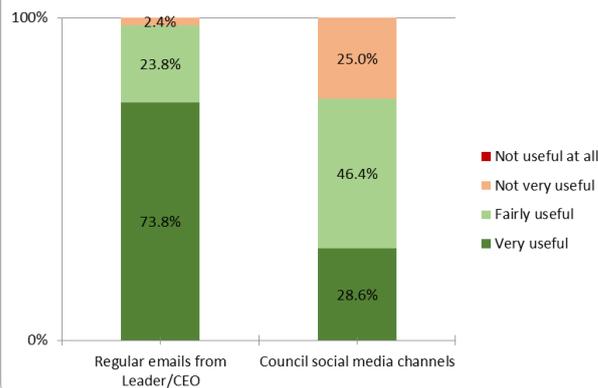
Is your Leeds base?



The partner survey went live on 19th May and closed on 18th June. We received 42 responses of which 69% have been located in Leeds for more than 10 years, 14% between 5 and 10 years, 14% between 2 and 5 years and 2% less than 2 years. 43% of these partners have a sole location of Leeds.

General consensus with 60% of these partners strongly agreeing that they have received the information they need from the council on pandemic related issues, 38% tended to agree and 2% tended to disagree with this point. 98% of these partners find the regular emails from the Leader/CEO very useful. With 75% of these companies finding the social media channels useful.

How useful have you found the following communications from the council throughout the pandemic?

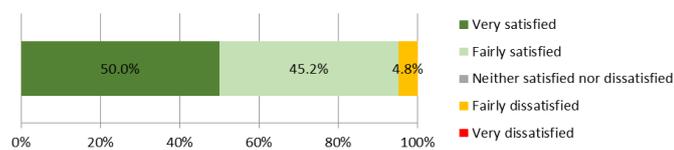


Comments received from partners are mostly positive with a focus on the good visibility of leadership in Leeds from the Leader and CEO. Partners have found the regular emails and updates useful and have stated that as the pandemic progressed the communication became much stronger and clearer. Partners have found the cross sector/collaborative working faster and more effective than before. There's positive feedback that the council worked particularly well with distributing finances quickly with great support from the Grants team. 100% Digital Leeds was recognised as a great project which helped charitable businesses hugely from their expertise, advice and training (and funding). It has been recognised that holding online meetings can be beneficial and less time consuming, this is something partners would like to carry on going forward.

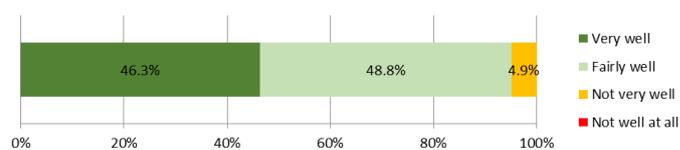
A number of partners have found it difficult to get time with senior officers to present new ideas and ways of working. Also some partners felt that further guidance from ASC in the early months could have been more helpful. It was noted that normal services slowed down to accommodate the urgent needs of the pandemic causing certain problems with statutory requirements, but acknowledgement that this was understandable.

They also suggest that some partners felt recognition of other affected businesses could have been useful, not just those in retail and hospitality etc. A bigger focus on immediate activities around supporting businesses was seen, more information on the longer term economic agenda for the city would be welcomed. City Centre businesses would find more encouragement of bringing people back into the city useful.

Overall how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the council has responded to the pandemic?



In your experience, how well or not has the council managed to keep its services running throughout the pandemic?



Overall out of the partners that responded with over 95% most thought the council managed to keep its services running very or fairly well throughout the pandemic, with most of these partners satisfied with the way LCC responded to the pandemic.

How well do you feel the council understands the needs of your organisation?

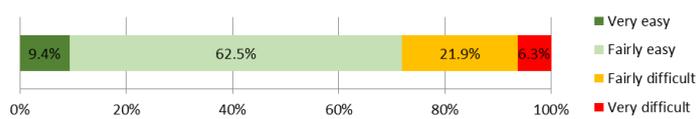


How much do you trust Leeds City Council?

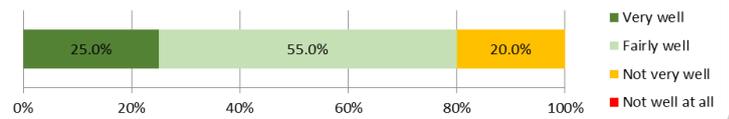


85% percent of the partners who responded feel the council understands the needs of their organisation, with about 15% feeling their needs aren't understood very well or not well at all. 95% of these organisations trust the council a great deal or a fair amount, with 5% not trusting LCC very much.

How easy or difficult do you find it is to do business with Leeds City Council? (if applicable)

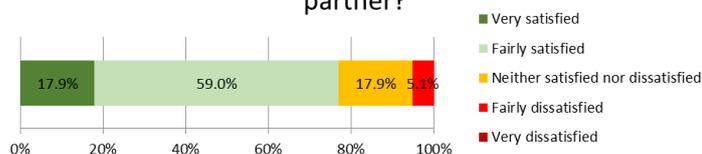


How well do you understand the council's overall vision and ambition for the city?



72% of partners who responded find it very easy of fairly easy to do business with the council. 28% of partners find it fairly difficult or very difficult. 80% of these partners understand the councils overall vision and ambition for the city but 20% don't understand these very well.

Overall how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by the council as a partner?



77% of the partners who responded are very satisfied or are fairly satisfied with the service provided by the council as a partner. With 23% of partners being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied or are fairly dissatisfied.

Comments received from partners suggest that the collaborative ways of working are positive and would like to see this carry on moving forward into the post pandemic world.

Partners appreciated being able to feed into council policies and strategies, for example being an ambassador for the Womens friendly Leeds, being a member of the financial inclusion unit, or being on the social enterprise network. Invitations to take part in forums and conferences and feeling partners voices are heard is important to them.

The comments also suggest that partners feel there is still need and room for greater joining of dots across culture, economy, social care, research and inward investment - visitor economy (and Leeds 2023). But there is also positive feeling about the commitment, expertise and collaborative approach of many of the Council officers and leaders.

Further emphasis on supporting the local supply chain through incorporating social value etc. in the procurement process would be well received. Along with improvements to commissioner-provider partnership, with more focus on achieving agreed outcomes for citizens rather than what some businesses feel is the collection and reporting finance-led, detailed and burdensome output statistics.

Some partners feel that a stronger, deeper partnership with the private sector would be beneficial.