

Equality Assembly Refresh 2024

Introduction

The Equality Assembly was initially set up in 2009/10 to ensure Leeds involves all its diverse communities. It is a forum made up of Equality Hubs for the protected characteristics, which helps ensure Leeds City Council is engaging with and involving the full range of citizens that live in Leeds in the decisions it makes. It offers all equality groups the opportunity to meet and work together to let the council know the issues that affect them. Each Hub is lead by Hub representatives who meet separately to drive forward the agenda of their respective Hub in partnership with the Equality team.

Once a year an Equality Assembly Conference is held, which is a chance to look at the work of the Hubs over the previous 12 months and to discuss challenges ahead in an intersectional way.

Equality Assembly History

The Drivers for establishing the Equality Assembly was a report commissioned by the Leeds City Council Equality Team in 2007 known as the Red Paint report which asked a fundamental question about whether the existing corporate equality consultation arrangements were enabling all of Leeds diverse communities to engage with the council in ways that lead to improvements in how such groups can effectively contribute to and influence the way in which services are delivered to them. The overarching conclusion was that although there are a range of documents, guidance and toolkits in place as well as a relatively long history and tradition of supporting equality forums these were not enabling the potential of the 'voice' of diverse communities to be maximised through meaningful and sustainable consultation and involvement. As a result the Equality Assembly concept was born – using a community development “bottom up” approach – rather than a “top down”, statutory sector led approach.

Particularly since Covid, the number of attendees at some of the Equality hub meetings have dropped. There are also now less hub representatives due to a variety of reasons. The Equality team are therefore undertaking this light touch review of the equality assembly and equality hubs to update its procedures and increase engagement across all the hubs and their representatives. This review of the Equality Assembly includes:

- Renewing the Equality Assembly Terms of Reference.
- Updating the process for recruiting new Hub Representatives.
- Addressing gaps in consultation regarding young people and carers.
- Strengthening engagement with partners
- Marketing and promotion of the Hubs and Hub Reps

Current Equality Hubs

Currently there are three hubs which are lead by the Equality team at Leeds City Council – The Religion or Belief Hub, the Disability Hub and the LGBT+ Hub. There are three Hubs which are lead by Third Sector organisations – The Culturally Diverse Hub (commissioned from Voluntary Action Leeds), the Women and Girls Hub (commissioned from Womens Lives Leeds) and the Older People's Hub (commissioned from Leeds Older Peoples Forum).

Part of this review focuses on existing consultation and engagement with Carers and Young People and how they can be linked in with the Equality Assembly. Below is a summary of the Hubs and a short overview of their ways of working and levels of engagement.

Summary of Equality Hubs

Equality Team Led Hubs – all proposed to have between 5 and 10 Hub Reps

Equality Hub	Active Hub Reps	Meeting Details	Hub Engagement
Religion or Belief Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 	<p>Hub meetings quarterly at Civic Hall, chaired on a rotational basis by hub reps</p> <p>Hub rep meetings quarterly</p>	Good representation across all faiths. Approximately 10 to 15 attending
LGBT+ Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 	<p>Hub meetings quarterly at Leeds Playhouse and online via Zoom. Chaired by the LGBT+ Lead Member</p> <p>Hub rep meetings quarterly online</p>	Between 10-20 attending. Numbers increasing slowly at meetings.
Disability Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 	<p>Hub meetings Quarterly at AGE UK and moving to Civic Hall later in 2024. Chair has indicated he will stand down this year</p> <p>Hub reps meetings not happening currently.</p>	Numbers increasing slowly at meetings, approximately 20 attendees, although more representation across all disabilities needed. More people starting to use online option to meet.

Third Sector Led Hubs – all to formally recruit between 5 and 10 Hub Reps

Equality Hub	Meeting Details	Hub Engagement
Culturally Diverse lead by Voluntary Action Leeds	Monthly across a range of working groups	Focus includes events during Black History Month.
Women and Girls Hub lead by Women's Lives Leeds	Meet at least 4 times a year	<p>Good engagement from Womens organisations. Focus includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helping the council to be a Women Friendly Recruiter. Supporting the promotion of Women Friendly Leeds activities and events across Leeds City Council Services. Support the celebration of International Women's Day.
Older Peoples Hub lead by Leeds Older Peoples Forum	Quarterly meetings at different venues across Leeds.	Good attendance at some meetings in 2023. Further promotion and involvement of older people in shaping agendas and priorities planned

Other Equality Areas

Unpaid Carers Hub

An equality hub for unpaid carers was proposed when the Equality Assembly was established. It has only ever existed as a mailing list with face to face meetings not taking place. The Equality team recently met with colleagues in Adults and Health and proposals below reflect the intention to develop proposals for an Unpaid Carers Hub approach without duplicating existing engagement activity with CarersUnpaid Carers

Definition of a Carer

The Leeds Carers Partnership considers a carer to be a person of any age who looks after a relative or friend who couldn't manage without their help due to physical or mental ill-health, disability, frailty, sensory impairment, genetic condition, old age, or addiction. The care that carers provide is unpaid and as such this definition does not extend to paid care-workers who work in a variety of settings, or someone who is providing care as a volunteer on behalf of a voluntary organisation. The care that carers provide varies and can include but is not limited to, personal care and nursing tasks, emotional support, domestic tasks, coordinating appointments, managing finances, providing transport, dealing with emergencies, and keeping the person they care for safe. On the date of the 2021 Census, approximately 61,500 people in Leeds stated that they provided unpaid care. This represents around 8% of the population of Leeds aged 5 and over. Around 30% of carers in Leeds are caring for in excess of 50 hours per week.

Leeds Carers Partnership

The Leeds Carers Partnership is the lead group in Leeds focussed on the development and improvement of services that support carers. Membership of the Leeds Carers Partnership aims to reflect the stakeholders to the Leeds Carers Partnership Strategy and includes carers as well as key staff from the public, private and voluntary sector. The partnership are currently reviewing their strategy with a view to launching a refresh during 2024. An Unpaid Carers Hub could be a valuable resource for the Leeds Carers Partnership.

Proposal

The new Unpaid Carers Hub will aim to gather the views and experiences of unpaid carers in Leeds in relation to city and service developments as well as providing an opportunity for unpaid carers to tell Leeds City Council and the Leeds Carers Partnership about the issues that affect them. The Unpaid Carers Hub will meet virtually on a quarterly basis recognising the demand on carers time. It is proposed the launch the Unpaid Carers Hub in the first quarter of 2025 subject to further discussions with Carers Leeds and Leeds Parent Carer Forum and other stakeholders. Promotion would take place via social media, Carers Leeds Newsletter, Leeds Parent & Carer Forum, Leeds Carers Partnership and through the existing mailing list. Early discussions with Carers Leeds and Leeds Parent Carer Forum are proposed.

Young People

As part of the Equality Assembly review we wanted to look at how consultation with young people is carried out across the council and partners as there isn't currently a separate Hub for young people.

Children, young people and their parents and carers have a right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. Having a voice and influence means they feel that their voices are listened to, valued and can influence decisions and actions. We use the term 'voice and influence' as children and young people have told us they want one definition, because there are so many different terms e.g., participation; empowerment; and active engagement, that it can be confusing.

Leeds has a bold ambition to be the best city for children and young people – a child friendly city. At the heart of making this a reality is a commitment to working restoratively with children and young people so that their voices are at the heart of decisions that affect them. There is strong evidence that working with children and young people wherever possible, instead of doing things to them or for them, produces better outcomes and helps to build confidence and resilience.

Giving a voice and influence to children and young people in decision making demonstrates our commitment to them and acknowledges their right to shape their own future. It increases trust and can enable positive change even in complex situations.

Practitioners can feel confident that decisions are informed by what children, young people and families say they want and need, which should lead to better quality services, saving money and using resources more effectively.

Working restoratively to listen and respond to the voices of children and young people is fundamental to front line-work that takes place every day across the city. Children and young people's voices should be considered at all levels:

- at an individual level: they are involved in making choices and influencing decisions about their own lives, for example co-producing their education, health and care plan or a child working with their teacher to agree their learning targets
- at a family level: all members of the family are involved in sharing their views, making choices and influencing decisions that affect their family. For example, a child and a range of their family members would be directly involved in developing an action plan at a Family Group Conference
- at a service level: they are involved in shaping and influencing how services they use are planned, delivered and evaluated. Feedback is sought in a range of ways and routinely informs service improvement, for example evaluating their service through using feedback forms or setting up a focus group to seek their views on what services should be offered.
- at a strategic level, they influence local or city-wide priorities and agendas, for example in staff recruitment panels for senior leaders or representing their peers on a city wide or local forum where they make recommendations or advise decision makers

Listening consistently to the voices of children, young people and families is central to the culture Leeds is working to create and this is evident in:

- the **Child Friendly Leeds 12 wishes** which were refreshed in 2022 and developed using the consultation findings which represented the views of over 80,000 children and young people

Child Friendly Leeds Wish 3 'Children and young people express their views, feel heard and are involved in decisions that affect their lives. Children and young people have a greater awareness of the different ways they can share their views and ideas. They know

how to influence change within their school and community. They have access to support and training to develop their skills and confidence to enable them to have a voice and influence.”

- the city’s **Children and Young People’s Plan 2023- 28**. One of the five outcomes in the Plan from the outset and in the refreshed plan is that... ‘*All children and young people are active citizens who feel they have voice & influence*’ and a core behaviour of all staff is to “*listen and respond to the voice of the child*”
- article 12 of the [UN convention on the rights of the child](#), which states that ‘*every child and young person has the right to express their views freely – about everything that affects them*’

The Voice and Influence Team

The Voice Influence and Change team is based in the Children and Families Directorate and was established in 2012. The team consists of 5 officers who are led by the Strategy and Influence Lead. The Strategy and Influence Lead has also been the lead for the Child Friendly Leeds Team since October 2020.

The role of the Voice Influence and Change team in Leeds City Council is to support and enable children, young people, parents and carers to have a voice and influence over services that are provided in our city. The team support staff across services by facilitating the participation of children, young people, parents and carers in the recruitment of senior roles and commissioning services. Providing advice and guidance on how to involve children, young people, parents and carers in different elements of service development, design and review. Promoting citywide voice and influence news and opportunities such as consultations, new groups and events to the networks

The team work in partnership with strategic boards, senior leaders and elected members and organise annual takeovers and opportunities for young people to share their views and priorities with decision makers. The team work also with representatives from support groups for parents and carers with children with SEND to share issues and meet with relevant managers and services and work in partnership with social care to help develop 'Let's Talk' sessions which enable feedback to Children’s Social Care from families who have received social work input to their family.

The team facilitate a wide range of city-wide youth voice programmes including: 'Have a Voice' Children in Care Council, Care Leavers Council, SEND Youth Forum, Leeds Youth Council, Leeds Children's Mayor and UK Youth Parliament. The team deliver an annual SEND youth summit and Primary School Leeds Children’s Mayor Summit. The team work in partnership with the Communities team and Community Committees to deliver community youth voice summits across the city.

The team are also responsible for the coordination of the [Leeds SEND local offer](#) which provides information about education, health and social care services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their parents or carers. The team run an annual Leeds Local Offer event and facilitate monthly Leeds Local Offer drop-in sessions for families.

Proposal

- That all Hubs seek to improve attendance from and engagement with younger peoples voices as appropriate.
- That all Hubs consider younger peoples issues and voices for their protected characteristic area when providing challenge around the provision of services

- That the Equality Assembly works in partnership with the Voice and Influence Team at Leeds City Council to engage with children where it is more appropriate to consult and engage using existing forums for their voices rather than via the Hub meetings.
- Colleagues from the Children and Families Directorate to attend hub meetings

The Hub Representatives

Currently there is inconsistency in terms of the numbers of Hub Representatives across the various Hubs and the aim is ensure that each Hub has between 5 and 10 Hub Representatives who will lead on the work of each Hub, set and chair meetings and meet together quarterly to ensure that the Hubs are working together in a joined up way. These Hub Representatives will also work with the Equality Lead Members for each of the protected characteristic groups.

Proposal

- That the terms of reference are refreshed to include an expression of interest form and process for appointing new Hub Reps and that promotional work is undertaken to encourage people to step forward to undertake these roles.
- That the Equality Assembly Newsletter is used to encourage new Hub Representatives alongside other channels.
- That each Hub has between 5 and ten Hub Representatives at any given time.
- That we restart the Hub Reps Network meeting quarterly to give Hub Reps the opportunity to work with Hub Res from other Hubs and to encourage intersectional working.

Promotion and Engagement

As part of the refresh of the Equality Assembly, The Equality team will work with internal and external partners to promote all of the hubs in order to increase attendees with people of lived experience and organisations working with people from the relevant equality characteristics.

Comms will include:

- Leeds City Council Comms team to promote all Equality Hubs via Corporate social media.
- Equality team to promote all Equality hubs through existing Equality hub social media channels.
- Equality Team to promote the work of the Hubs via the councils consultation and engagement network.
- The Equality Team and Lead Member to work with Corporate Equality Board to encourage services to attend hub meetings.
- Equality team to update Equality Assembly page on leeds.gov.uk with information on all the Hubs and their work .
- Equality team to produce up to date leaflets to be promoted at events such as Pride marketplace, International Day of Disabled People marketplace and Interfaith week.
- Promotion via umbrella organisations such as VAL and Forum Central

Consultation

Consultation will take place with all Hubs Reps about the review of the Equality Assembly including the refresh of the Terms of Reference and nomination of hub reps as well as ongoing discussions with council colleagues regarding children and young people and carers.

Draft Refreshed Equality Assembly Terms of Reference 2024

Overall Purpose

The Equality Assembly is a forum made up of Equality Hubs. The hubs provide a welcoming environment where Leeds' diverse communities or organisations representing Leeds' diverse communities meet to discuss themes and issues which affect their quality of life.

Equality hubs offer all equality groups the opportunity to make the council aware of the issues which have a direct impact on them.

Aims and Objectives

1. To bring together diverse communities where they can share experiences and good working practice
2. To encourage hub members to raise key issues and discuss how access to services and employment can be improved so that they meet the needs of the city's diverse communities.
3. To empower and involve hub members in identifying barriers to services and influencing the decisions the Council make to overcome these barriers.
4. To work with the council to ensure that due regard to equality and diversity is given to services, strategies, policies and employment opportunities.
5. To contribute and in some cases, challenge the council's approach to equality priorities, consultations and involvement opportunities.
6. To provide regular contact between the equality hubs and the council. Due consideration must be given to hub members' access, communication and support needs. This includes sign language interpreters, induction loops, personal assistants and information in alternative formats.
7. These Terms of Reference are to be reviewed every three years and can be amended if agreed by the hubs.

Role of Equality Hub Members

1. Membership is open to anyone who identifies with or represents any of the following equality characteristics: Age (older and younger people); Carers; Race (ethnically diverse); Disability; Sex; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT+) and Religion or Belief. Members can be involved with more than one hub as we recognise people identify with multiple characteristics. Allies can attend Hub meetings however the Hubs aim to amplify the voices of people traditionally underrepresented in consultation and engagement. Some Hub meetings and activity may be focused on/restricted to certain groups if it is a proportionate means to a legitimate aim.
2. Membership is open to council officers if they identify with the equality characteristics of the hub they would like to join. Officers must declare any expressions of interests and be actively conscious that they are attending in their personal capacity and not representing the council. They should be aware of potential conflicts of interest and be sensitive to the concerns of other hub members.

3. Members can attend in their own personal capacity and do not have to be involved with any other voluntary, community or faith sector organisation although they can also represent an organisation.
4. Members are asked to promote the work of the equality hubs and feedback information to their wider networks.
5. Agendas for Hub meetings will be agreed between the Equality Team (or commissioned third sector partner) and the Hub Reps. The hub meetings are not the appropriate place to discuss personal situations or cases.
6. Members are expected to be courteous and respect fellow hub members', for example, not interrupting and giving everyone the opportunity to contribute to the discussions.
7. Members are reminded that guest speakers may be attending hub meetings for the first time and they should try to encourage ongoing positive relationships. Members are asked to listen and respect guest speakers, especially where there is potential conflict.

Selection of Equality Hub Representatives

1. Expression of interest applications to be a Hub representative can be submitted to equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk . A panel featuring the Equality team, the organisation commissioned to run the Hub where applicable and existing hub reps will assess the applications. The expression of interest will be assessed on three main criteria: Why people are interested in the role; What skills can they bring; and what capacity do they have to contribute.
2. At minimum of 5 and maximum of 10 hub members can represent their hub at any one time, but a maximum of 2 per hub can attend the hub representatives Network meetings. It is the responsibility of the hub representatives to decide who attends meetings on behalf of the hub.
3. Hub representatives can only represent one hub.

Role of Equality Hub Representatives

1. To provide feedback at hub meetings about the work they have been involved with as a hub representative so that all hub members are given the opportunity to comment and contribute.
2. To try and attract more members and promote the diversity within the hub.
3. To work with the Equality Team with organising the annual Equality Assembly Conference.
4. Attend quarterly Hub Representatives Network meetings (as agreed with other hub representatives) and bring to them issues which have been raised at their individual hub.
5. From time to time, hub representatives may be asked to attend additional meetings to further the work of the Equalities Assembly and the citywide equality agenda.

Role of Council Services

1. Before attending hub meetings, council services are asked to have a clear idea of the equality issues they would like to discuss and how they relate to the specific hub.
2. Council services are expected to give hub members the opportunity to choose or raise issues which are relative to their particular hub.
3. Council services are expected to be clear about how hub members can contribute to the council business plan, council priorities and strategies, and to update hubs accordingly.

Role of the Equality Team

1. Liaise with council services and promote the work and purpose of the Equality Assembly.
2. Act as a conduit on behalf of the hub members and council services. This will involve requesting information from services to disseminate to hub members and asking officers to attend future hub/hub representative's meetings.
3. Make sure that hubs have the opportunity to influence council services, strategies and policies through the process of giving due regard to equality and diversity.
4. Work closely with the hub members and hub representatives for equality and diversity advice and setting the agendas for future hub meetings.
5. To ensure that any council services visiting the equality hubs have a good working knowledge about the aims of the hubs and, if necessary, the specific equality characteristic.
6. To support hubs when they request to work or share information with organisations external to the council on equality issues.
7. Support the Equality Assembly in organising the annual Equality Assembly Conference.
8. Provide administration for the Council lead Hubs, the Hub Representatives Network and the Equalities Assembly Conference.
9. Aim to provide reasonable access requirements for all hub members.

**Draft New Equalities Assembly Hub Representative
Self-Nomination Form**

Name

Address

Telephone:Email

I would like to become a Hub Representative for the following Hub (please note that you can only apply to be a Representative of one Hub):

.....

Please explain in around 250 words, why you would like to become a Representative. Please include details about how your interests and skills can contribute to your role as a Representative as well as your capacity to contribute. **Please remember being a Hub representative is a voluntary role. However we can make reasonable adjustments to ensure everyone is able to access meetings.**

Applications returned to: Equality Team, Sixth Floor East, Merrion House, Leeds, LS2 8LX Or email us at: equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk