



Child Poverty Strategy 2024 - 2027

Our goal: Leeds is a city that reduces the impact of poverty and helps families who need it.

Children, young people and families experiencing the impact of poverty feel they are supported and receive the help they need. They have their basic rights and needs met.

[Child Friendly Leeds 12 Wishes](#)



Leeds
CITY COUNCIL

Welcome

Welcome to our refreshed Child Poverty Strategy for 2024-2027! As the Executive Member with responsibility for Children and Families, I'm proud that this strategy incorporates the voices and experiences of children and young people, aligning with our Best City Ambition and our work to build a Child Friendly Leeds.

Poverty has a profound impact on children, young people, and families. Poverty isn't merely a lack of essentials but a daily struggle, shaped by societal and political failures.

Our latest consultation highlighted crucial priorities identified by children and young people; the need to reduce the stigma and shame associated with poverty, ensure the fulfilment of basic needs, and enhance access to activities for children living in poverty. These priorities will help guide the work of the child poverty impact board over the next three years.

Our strategy is based around mitigating the impact of poverty and working with organisations to reduce the barriers that children, young people and families who live in poverty may experience. However, substantial, long-term change requires a government in power who prioritises resources, time and policies to tackle child poverty. We will continue to lobby the government to more accurately align benefits with living costs.

Leeds faces a rising number of children living in deprived areas, compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. As inflation persists, families face escalating costs for necessities like food, housing and childcare. The price of everyday children's essentials like winter coats and nappies are still going up.

This all adds up to an urgent and compelling need to address child poverty. National research indicates that Britain is facing the deepest living standards squeeze in a century, projecting child poverty levels not seen since the 1990s. About 19% of households with children, an estimated 1.5 million, are facing severe financial strain. Distressingly, approximately one million children are now living in destitution, nearly tripling since 2017.

The renowned academic, researcher and campaigner Sir Michael Marmot has underlined the gravity of the situation, warning of a potential humanitarian crisis impacting children's health, development, and educational opportunities. Leeds has partnered with Sir Michael Marmot to become a Marmot City, to accelerate work to reduce health inequalities. This work compliments our child poverty strategy, and has started with a specific focus on giving children the best start in life.

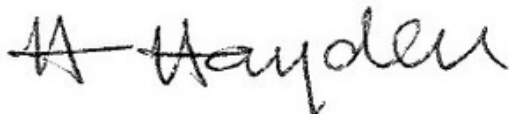
This refreshed child poverty strategy unifies efforts across the city, championing existing initiatives, and aligning all stakeholders toward a common goal of addressing child poverty.

The Child Poverty Impact Board, the citywide governance body which I chair, continues to sustain collaborative work, focusing on identified areas and developing new approaches. Notably, the importance of play now forms a workstream within the strategy, as a result of children lacking access to green spaces being highlighted during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Our commitment involves partnering with the third sector, public and private sectors, educational institutions, families and communities to alleviate the impact of poverty on children's lives, and I am immensely proud of the ongoing efforts across Leeds. I would like to thank everyone contributing to this work and look forward to collaborating with both current and new partners to take this Child Poverty Strategy forward.

Councillor Helen Hayden

Executive Member for Children and Families

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "H Hayden". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "H" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

How do we define poverty?

Poverty relates to having insufficient resources to meet essential/basic needs.

The term 'resources' generally relates to income such as earnings, benefits and savings, which all impact day to day living and access to 'Needs' such as food, housing, and other necessities such as healthcare, education and transport. It is important to recognise that needs vary by society, community and on an individual level.

Sociologist Peter Townsend, defined poverty in 1979 as: "Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies in which they belong."

Child Poverty Action Group state: 'Poverty is about more than just money, but a lack of money is the defining feature of being poor ... A child can have three meals a day, warm clothes and go to school, but still be poor because her parents don't have enough money to ensure she can live in a warm home, have access to a computer to do her homework, or go on the same school trips as her classmates.'

Households are considered to be below the UK poverty line if their income is 60% below the median household income after housing costs for that year.

Poverty is often presented in 'absolute' or 'relative' measures, both before and after housing costs. Relative poverty refers to households with less than 60% of contemporary median income, while absolute poverty refers households with less than 60% of the median income in 2010/11, uprated by inflation.

Who experiences poverty?

Anyone can experience poverty. Someone may be born into poverty, grow up in poverty, live life in poverty and die in poverty. Some people may never experience poverty, and some people will live life going in and out of poverty. Some people may experience poverty just once yet feel the impact for the rest of their life. There are some groups who are more vulnerable than others, such as people who have special educational needs and disabilities, women, and ethnically diverse communities. These groups are overrepresented in poverty statistics. Since the pandemic starting in 2020 there is a new generation of our population that are experiencing poverty. In addition, the cost-of-living crisis has meant that more families are now newly living in poverty and are less experienced in accessing support.

What are the statistics?

Looking at the most recently available data published in March 2023, it can be said that even by the lowest estimate, 1 in 5 children under 16 in Leeds are living in poverty.

The 2022/23 latest published data should be viewed as an estimate for the number of children living in poverty in Leeds and the UK.

A higher number and percentage of all dependent children under 20 in poverty in the UK are from households where at least one adult is in work (3m out of 4.3m children equating to 69% after housing costs)

4.3 million dependent children under 20 were living in relative poverty (after housing costs). This equates to 30% of children in the UK.

In Leeds, 27751 children under 16 were living in absolute poverty (18%) compared to 17% in 2021/22 and a national figure of 16%.

In Leeds, 33482 children under 16 were living in relative poverty before housing costs, equal to 22% (compared to a national figure of 20%).

What are the impacts of poverty?

Children who experience poverty are more likely to face a wide range of difficulties, both now and in the future. There are strong links between experiencing poverty as a child and having worse mental and physical health, a shorter life, lower grades in education, poor financial health and lower paid, insecure work.

Our recent consultation with over 200 children and young people in Leeds identified that stress and worry can be caused by not having access to basic needs, such as toiletries, clothes, shoes, medication and food. Living in food insecure households can result in hunger, malnutrition and obesity. Additionally, lacking basic needs resulting in coming to school cold, tired and hungry was recognised to have a significant impact on a child's ability to focus at school, impacting their academic performance.

The children and young people raised serious concerns about the emotional, physical and mental wellbeing of children experiencing poverty. The voice of the child came through very clearly in the consultation that living in poverty and accessing help (particularly receiving free school meals) can be a cause of shame and stigma for children and young people. The fear of "feeling judged" and being "bullied" was reiterated in the consultation and seen as a barrier to accessing support for children experiencing poverty.

Why is child poverty different to adult poverty?

The ways in which poverty is experienced by children cannot be understood through solely looking at adult poverty. To understand how poverty impacts the lives of children and young people, we need to talk to children and young people. Similarly, we cannot just focus on eradicating adult poverty as the solution to child poverty. We need to focus on mitigating the impact of poverty on children and young people, whilst we work as a city to improve the structures around people who experience, or are at risk of, poverty.



Why is poverty 'everyone's business'?

Child Poverty Action Group published research in March 2023 which estimates that child poverty in the UK costs £39.5 billion a year in lost tax and earnings, unemployment benefit and additional public service spending. This is up from £25 billion in 2008.

However, while research can estimate the huge financial cost to public finances and the economy, it is impossible to estimate the true cost of poverty, in terms of the physical and emotional suffering caused. Our recently consultation with over 200 children and young people from across Leeds identified shame, isolation and anxiety as key descriptors of the experience of children living in poverty. The young people shared concerns around the impact of poverty on crime rates, school grades and the health and wellbeing of children across the city.

If we as a city do not act, the risk is both moral and economical: poverty creates an unequal and inequitable system, which not only brings increased cost to all of our services, it also holds the moral cost of restricting the realities of Leeds citizens.

How does poverty relate to the rights of the child?

Poverty represents a loss of the rights of the child. The UN Convention Rights of the Child details 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child's life. Six are particularly relevant to child poverty; articles 3, 6, 12, 24, 26 and 27. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has said that all children living in poverty are vulnerable, but some groups are particularly vulnerable. These include younger children, indigenous children immigrant children and children living in single parent households.

What do we want?

We know that being in poverty, being excluded and feeling the shame and stigma associated with poverty can impact a child for the rest of their life. We don't want this in Leeds. We don't want any of our children, young people or families to feel excluded, alone, misunderstood, or ashamed, or lack access to their basic needs. We want to ensure that poverty presents no barriers for our children and young people, and we want all people to have access to the same opportunities, regardless of their background.

We believe that all children and young people should have the freedom to choose their pathway, and that we can work together as a city to tackle limitations that poverty may place on these pathways. So, we are working together, as a city, to reduce the impact of poverty on young people.

What is needed to make a difference?

Our Child Poverty Strategy in Leeds is based on the belief that it is fundamentally important to incorporate the voices of children, young people and their parents into plans, strategies and work. There is fantastic work being done across the city – but there are clear challenges and frustrations across different systems and organisations. So, we need to change those systems and organisations. We need to look at what the children, young people and parents want and need before we look at what organisations historically provide.

Who is needed to make a difference?

To address and improve the issue of poverty, a revolutionary approach is needed. We cannot make meaningful change unless we work together, tying in the intelligence, resources and work that is being done across the city to develop new knowledge and assess what makes the most difference, and why. We need everyone to get on board– children, young people, families, communities, schools, academies, education settings, private sectors, third sectors, public sectors, universities, faith groups, not for profit organisations & any other partners.

Our ambitions

- **We will be innovative, together, to break down the barriers and stigma that poverty creates.**
- **We will be brave, together, to revolutionise the way that Leeds works with children, young people and families who live in poverty.**
- **We will fight together to ensure that every child and young person who experiences poverty can thrive.**
- **We will work together to tackle inequality across services and organisations, to find meaningful solutions for those experiencing poverty.**

What is the Leeds approach?

The Best City Ambition is our overall vision for the future of Leeds. At its heart is our mission to tackle poverty and inequality and improve quality of life for everyone who calls Leeds home. Central to achieving this is focusing on improving outcomes across the 3 pillars of the Best City Ambition – Health and Wellbeing, Inclusive Growth and Zero Carbon. These capture the things that will make the biggest difference to improving peoples lives in Leeds and recognise both the city's achievements and its remaining challenges around poverty and inequalities.

The Children & Young Peoples Plan has tackling the impact of child poverty at the heart of the strategy with the vision for Leeds to be the best city in the UK and the best city for children and young people to grow up in; as well as a Child Friendly city. It aims to improve outcomes for all our children whilst recognising the need for outcomes to improve faster for children and young people from vulnerable and deprived backgrounds.

This Child Poverty Strategy and the governance of the Child Poverty Impact Board are in place to support these strategies and focus on agreed priorities that mitigate the impact of poverty on children and young people in Leeds.

We are creating inclusive, equal partnerships who use their knowledge and expertise to investigate the impact of poverty on a specific area of children's lives, and then work together to create projects that mitigate this impact.

These partnerships incorporate research-based intelligence with policies and projects to assess the most effective low cost, high impact solutions to improving the lives of children and young people in poverty.

The revision of this strategy involved extensive consultation with over 20 groups of young people across Leeds in summer 2023, with the aim of using the voice of children and young people to shed light on the true experience of children in poverty and ensure we are developing effective and meaningful strategies to tackle poverty in our city.

The Child Friendly Leeds 12 Wishes

Through consultations with over 80,000 children and young people over 3 years, we have developed the Child Friendly Leeds 12 Wishes (Child Friendly Leeds 12 Wishes). These wishes summarise what children and young think would make Leeds a better city to grow up in and form the basis of our children and young people’s strategy at Leeds City Council.

Wish 8 states the following:

“Leeds is a city that reduces the impact of poverty and helps families who need it. Children, young people and families experiencing the impact of poverty feel they are supported and receive the help they need. They have their basic rights and needs met.”

The CFL 12 Wishes - and Wish 8 in particular - are central considerations in the child poverty strategy and present to us a clear obligation to address the impact of poverty on children and young people in Leeds.

Child Friendly Leeds 12 Wishes

Since 2012, Leeds has had a vision to be a child friendly city and we had one simple question: **‘What is it like to be a child growing up in Leeds and how do we make it better?’**

Celebrating the tenth birthday, the feedback from local and city wide consultations, surveys, and ballots over the last 3 years was reviewed, capturing the views of 80,000 children and young people to identify the current top issues and priorities.

- Children and young people know how and where to get support for their mental health and wellbeing if they need it.
- Children and young people have safe spaces to play, hang out and have fun.
- Children and young people express their views, feel heard and are involved in decisions that affect their lives.
- Differences are celebrated in Leeds so children and young people feel accepted for who they are. They do not experience bullying and discrimination.
- Everyone takes more action to protect the environment from climate change.
- Children and young people can travel around the city safely and easily.
- Children and young people know about different things to do and places to go across the city. They enjoy different cultural experiences including art, music, sport and film.
- Leeds is a city that reduces the impact of poverty and helps families who need it.
- Children and young people have the support and information needed to make healthy choices. They have opportunities for regular physical activity.
- All children and young people are in learning settings that meet their needs.
- Young people have access to a wide range of work experience, employment and volunteering opportunities.
- Leeds is an inclusive city for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

8 of 12 CFL Wishes

we are child friendly Leeds

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What does our work look like?

There are two parts to our work: The Child Poverty Impact Board, which is a city-wide governance board that applies robust measures and targets to reduce the negative impact of child poverty, and seven Impact Workstreams. The workstreams focus on improving a specific area of young people's lives that is affected by poverty. Each workstream has a number of priorities that report to the Child Poverty Impact Board, with project plans and impact assessments and forward plans.

Threaded through each workstream will be the voice of the child and the feedback from our recent consultation that has been included below. This includes addressing the stigma of poverty, improving access to food and other basic needs and increasing our communication around available services.



What are the aims of these workstreams?

Removing Barriers to Learning

We want to support schools and settings to ensure that CYP who live in poverty can access learning and improve their educational experiences and outcomes.

Green Spaces and Play

We want to improve access to green spaces and opportunities to play in priority wards by cultivating the time, space and attitudes needed for children's play improving the quality of existing green spaces, and making streets safe, playful spaces for people to connect.

Best Start for Health & Wellbeing

We want every baby in Leeds from conception to age two to have the best start in life, with a focus on families living in the most deprived areas to ensure equitable outcomes for all.

Transitions & Employment

All young people have access to a wide range of work experience, employment and volunteering opportunities.

Financial Health & Inclusion

We want every family to be equipped with the support, guidance and opportunities needed to live financially secure lives.

Family Help

We want to ensure that children, young people and families experiencing poverty are able to access help and support without stigma or prejudice.

Housing & Provision

We want to support every family and young person living in social housing in Leeds to achieve a sustainable tenancy.