

# Stronger Leeds

A strategy for social cohesion in our city 2025 - 2030

# 1. Foreword – Councillor Mary Harland

Leeds is a city known for its warmth and inclusivity, celebrating the diversity of its communities. From the early migration that helped build our city to offering sanctuary to those escaping conflict, Leeds has a proud tradition of welcoming people from all backgrounds, faiths, and beliefs.

The past few years have however presented significant challenges - not just for Leeds, but for cities across the UK. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us into social isolation, and its long-term effects have been deeply felt. Over a decade of austerity, coupled with rampant inflation and a cost-of-living crisis, has strained public services and posed new challenges for families, organisations, and businesses across our great city. These economic pressures have impacted our ability to connect, socialise, and engage within and between our communities.

Recent events have further tested us. The conflict between Israel and Hamas has deeply affected many in our community whilst violent unrest in Harehills has shown that tensions can surface and escalate quickly when communities feel targeted. Far right protests and disorder fuelled by hate online led to serious flashpoints in Leeds and across the UK. These incidents remind us that there is serious grievance, anger and hate for some, leading to fear and threat for others. We cannot be complacent about the strength of our relationships and the sense of belonging in our city. Social cohesion requires ongoing effort and commitment - it is not something we can take for granted.

In developing this strategy, we engaged with over a thousand residents through surveys and focus groups. The message is clear: Leeds is proud of its diversity and multiculturalism. We are committed to being a place where racism and prejudice are actively challenged, and where extremist views and hate are challenged and countered.

Drawing on your insights and incorporating your priorities, we have created a strategy to build stronger, more cohesive communities. Our vision is to set clear objectives to challenge hate, foster positive relationships, encourage active participation and ensure that everyone feels they belong in Leeds.

Leeds City Council must lead by example, upholding equality and fairness in everything we do. We will continue to challenge racism, prejudice, and inequality wherever it occurs, both within our organisation and in the wider community, to create a fairer, more inclusive city for all. But importantly, we will work with you and with our partners to do the same. We are stronger together.

So thank you to everyone who contributed to developing this strategy. I hope that you will join me in playing your part and working together to strengthen and support our communities, helping make Leeds the BEST city to live, get on, get involved and belong.

Cllr Mary Harland

Executive Member for Communities, Customer Services and Community Safety

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### 3. Introduction

Leeds takes pride in being a vibrant and inclusive city, celebrating its rich cultural diversity and prioritising accessibility for all. We believe that every individual matters and should have the opportunity to contribute their unique strengths and talents to the collective success of Team Leeds. By working in partnership across the public, private, and voluntary sectors, we are committed to realising this vision.

In recent years, however, our sense of community and democratic values have faced significant challenges. Events at local, national, and international levels have tested our communities. Brexit, for example, deepened divisions and polarised families. The Covid-19 pandemic further highlighted underlying inequalities, disproportionately impacting marginalised groups and contributing to a growing mistrust in authorities. Additionally, the cost-of-living crisis has placed immense strain on many households, leaving too many people struggling to meet basic needs.

The digital age presents both opportunities and challenges. While advancements in technology bring innovative solutions, unregulated artificial intelligence presents risks to democratic systems. Similarly, social media platforms often enhance echo chambers, which amplify division and reduce empathy. The spread of disinformation and fake news, facilitated by online anonymity, has further undermined trust and unity within communities.

These are challenging times and whilst our communities have shown remarkable resilience, communities that are fragmented and disconnected remain more vulnerable. Now, more than ever, we need to invest in and strengthen our social connections across faith, race and difference to build trust, foster confidence, and cultivate a shared sense of pride in our city that can resist the forces of division.

**Social cohesion** is about how well people from different backgrounds, cultures, and social groups get on and live together peacefully, sharing common values, goals, and responsibilities. It is about how strong relationships are, and the sense of solidarity we have, with others in our neighbourhoods and the wider community. A cohesive society is one that embraces inclusivity, where people trust one another and the institutions that serve them, and where we actively work to reduce tensions and conflict rooted in race, religion or other differences.

In a cohesive society, we are empathetic towards others and move beyond divisive ‘us and them’ narratives. It is a society where we promote kindness, understanding and a curiosity towards other people. This creates a society that is not only a nicer place for us all to live, but one that is better for our collective prosperity, health and wellbeing.

Socially connected and cohesive local areas are better equipped in the face of crisis, challenge and change, and people are individually healthier, happier and experience greater wellbeing.

Involvement in volunteering and playing an active role are some of the outcomes that we know will help build a more cohesive community, but they also help the individual too.

Put simply, we know that investing in social cohesion has far reaching socio-economic and health benefits, as well as more resilient and safer communities. We know that over time, cohesive communities support one another and build independence - reducing the need for top-down public service interventions. We are also aware that the best way to build resilience and social cohesion is to collaborate with our partners, ensuring that our plans and work are place-based and locally led.

We are committed to work with our partners in the voluntary and faith, civic and business sectors alongside our public services to put social cohesion and resilience at the heart of our work, striving to foster better and stronger relationships – bridging and bonding - between different groups and communities.

We want Leeds to be a place where we have the skills to hold difficult conversations and understand that we will not always think alike but can agree to disagree amicably; where we promote good relationships between people of different backgrounds; where everyone feels they belong to the city and have a role to play in their community; and where we work tirelessly to ensure everyone feels safe and secure.

This strategy will complement the priorities of the Leeds Best City Ambition and focus on strengthening **relationships, participation** and developing a sense of **belonging** for all our residents.

## 4. Leeds today

Leeds is recognised as one of the United Kingdom's most successful cities. It has transformed itself over the last 50 years from a mainly industrial city into a broadly based commercial centre regarded as the most important financial, legal and business service centre outside of London.

Leeds is a quality place to live, work and raise families and has attracted a growing population count going from an increase of 4.8% between 2001 and 2011, to 7.4% between 2011 and 2021. Our current population is 812,000 and includes a rich diversity of over 100 different nationalities speaking over 175 different languages.

As a city of sanctuary, Leeds is built on migration from near and far, and has benefited economically, culturally and socially as a result. The first real wave of migration to the city began shortly after the Irish potato famine began in the 1830's. Jewish communities began to appear in Leeds in the 1840's with a significant increase towards the 19<sup>th</sup> century as persecution against them grew. Throughout the 1900's the arrival of Windrush migrants and a growing Sikh and Muslim population from the 1950's saw the diversity of the city's population increase at a steady rate.

Nowadays, people from different ethnic, cultural and lifestyle backgrounds make up our city and the places in which we live, work and play. The overt and subtle influence of diverse cultures on food, fashion, music, interior design and architecture are evident right across the city.

Around the world migration has increased due, in part, to people fleeing political unrest and conflict and also to others seeking education and employment opportunities. Many migrants come to the United Kingdom for work. Between March 2013 and March 2024, 98,463 non-United Kingdom nationals from over 150 countries registered for national insurance numbers from addresses in Leeds.

A vibrant student population in Leeds is something we have long since celebrated in our city. As with any population, they bring their own diverse identities and cultures to Leeds and help shape the city. The student population stood at 75,000 in 2021/22 and continues to rise year on year. This population is also migrating. While the inner Northwest parts of the city continue to be home to a large number of students, most of the growth we are seeing comes with more and more students choosing to live in the city centre. Any migration has its impact on housing stock and culture in areas so is something that will impact the shape of the city's communities and social cohesion over time.

People are living longer in Leeds, but often with more complex health needs over a longer period of time<sup>1</sup>. The percentage of people over 64 years is currently 15% across the city with many more of those from diverse backgrounds and more of those likely to live in IMD1 areas (areas defined as having higher levels of poverty). This has significant social justice implications for us as a city as people within these groups tend to have a higher level of need for health and other public services. As a city that is striving for 'Best City' status to tackle

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<sup>1</sup> Leeds JSA 2024

poverty and inequality - we will need to consider the shape, expectations, cultural awareness and cultural competency of those services for older people in the future.

Having strong social connections is an important factor for us all in terms of our health and wellbeing.

Being socially active is a strong protective factor for physical and mental health and wellbeing of all ages, especially for younger and older adults. Social isolation and loneliness impact health in a way that is comparable to well established risk factors such as smoking and obesity. With Leeds large student population and higher numbers of older people those IMD1 areas of the city – attention must be focused on how to reduce isolation and increase social connectedness to help all our communities to feel that they ‘belong’ both physically and mentally. This means ensuring people have the means and ability to connect ranging from being digitally ‘included’ in our society, through to knowing that there are neighbours checking in on one another.

Leeds has a unique geography with a vibrant urban centre surrounded by towns, villages and more rural areas, each with their own distinct history and character. Whilst this brings tremendous diversity and strength – it has an effect on how people experience services, connection and how they view their ‘communities’ and their sense of belonging to those. We know that improving bus routes and services through to ensuring an even spread of voluntary sector support across the city; is key to ensuring all our communities are experiencing the connection, opportunities and support that they need.

## **5. Building a Stronger Leeds**

From July to August 2023, we ran an online survey for six weeks to help inform our approach to social cohesion in the city. Promoted through our social media channels, our teams working across Leeds and our community partners, we engaged over 1400 residents from across all wards in the city through the survey.

Alongside the survey, our youth service teams surveyed a further 120 young people, and we ran focus groups with 69 residents from groups across the city. The focus groups included young people and older people, as well as those from different ethnicities and backgrounds. The focus groups allowed the participants to share their experiences as well as identify issues and concerns that were perceived as barriers to social cohesion. Importantly, it was a chance to hear about ideas on how we build on, and improve, social relationships in the city.

We consulted:

Engaged with survey	Completed Survey responses	Young people Survey	Multi-cultural focus groups consulted	Number of focus group participants
1472	880	120	7	69

In addition to the survey and focus groups, we undertook research across the country and considered the strategies and workstreams that we already have in place in the city. This led us to a set of clear principles and priorities for our work going forwards.

We have also considered the results of the Big Leeds Chat exercise that has informed the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-30. This was a series of local events, in which people were engaged in conversations to find out what matters to them, and what they need to improve their health and wellbeing. Some of the key themes identified align very closely with the work of the Stronger Leeds strategy, including ‘a city where fears about crime and antisocial behaviour are no barrier to enjoying everything the community has to offer’ and ‘a city where green spaces are kept tidy and welcoming, because services understand the vital role they play in keeping people well’.

## Our Principles

Our approach to develop social cohesion is underpinned by four key principles:

- **Participation**
- **Relationships**
- **Belonging**
- **Equalities**

When we asked communities what they wanted to see, it was clear from the responses that these were the key areas we needed to address and strengthen. Alongside our Best City



Ambition that outlines a clear commitment to tackling inequalities wherever they exist, we will deliver a number of priority actions.

**Participation** means that people feel able to get involved and contribute to their neighbourhoods and communities. Whether that be attending a community meeting or volunteering at a festival – participants told us they wanted to get involved in activities that help build trust, promote good communication, a sense of shared ownership and responsibility, and most of all pride in where they live. Our priorities will support our residents to become more active citizens.

**Relationships** are key to social cohesion. Participants told us that relationships – friendships and family – were the key reason for feeling a sense of pride and belonging in Leeds. Relationships are hugely important to people - and that's not just with those that they know. Residents want to build a sense of connection and reach out to their neighbours, as well as those from different and diverse backgrounds. Residents also want to connect with local institutions such as the council, health, housing providers and other public services - building trust and respect both ways.

**Belonging** is the sense that we can feel safe and that we are part of something bigger and have a stake in the city. When we are able to participate, enjoy good relationships and feel safe and accepted in the places and spaces that we live work and play, we can bond and bridge with those around us and our sense of belonging increases.

**Equalities** means breaking down the barriers to participation and success. From the Cost-of-Living Crisis to the legacy of COVID, we know that not all our communities feel they have equal access or opportunities, and this is the central priority within our Best City Ambition in Leeds. When people feel they are treated fairly, they feel better able to relate to one another. We will seek to address this in every aspect of our cohesion work.

## Our Priorities

In this section, we talk about our priorities and what informed them.

## 1. Enhance community safety

**Working closely with our residents, voluntary sector and partners from police, housing and other statutory bodies we will actively challenge and tackle anti-social behaviour, intolerance, hate, prejudice and discrimination.**

The survey and focus groups that we ran showed a clear desire to **enhance community safety**. When we asked **what makes it easier for communities to get along with one another in your local area**, you told us that a community where you all feel safe was hugely important.

When we asked **what impacts how well people get along with one another**, anti-social behaviour was cited as the number one concern. A further 32% of respondents felt that racism is an issue and 24% were concerned about hate crime.

During our focus group discussions, people told us that some people do not feel safe to let their children play out due to fear of abuse and violence. You also told us that parks and green spaces are important social places for you – they need to be safe and accessible to all.

We are therefore placing safety at the top of our priority list because unless we feel safe, the conditions for social cohesion are limited. Much of this work will link to the priorities of the Leeds Community Safety Strategy 2024-2027.

### **What we will do:**

- Support and promote initiatives and campaigns aimed at tackling anti-social behaviour, intolerance and hate, inequality and discrimination.
- Increase community tension monitoring working with our statutory and voluntary partners to improve detection and enhance our understanding of what underlies and is contributing to the tensions.
- Improve our partnership approach to ensure flashpoint incidents and events are responded to quickly and effectively with a multi-agency response.
- Facilitate dialogue and apply conflict resolution methods where there have been serious tensions and conflicts between and within communities to help repair relationships and address tensions.
- Train frontline staff in statutory and voluntary sector organisations to better identify and tackle prejudice and hate, including hate crime.
- Raise awareness of mechanisms for reporting hate crime and promote a culture of confidence in reporting.
- Improve understanding of the links between hate crime and extremism and develop a more coordinated approach to the delivery of interventions and initiatives.

## 2. Create safe spaces for dialogue

**These spaces will give opportunities to increase understanding and develop the skills to analyse and think critically.**

The survey and focus groups we delivered pointed to the need for **safe spaces for people of all ages to come together to talk** about what they see, hear and experience in their communities, the media and online.

When we asked **what is important to you and your family in helping make your community feel cohesive** you told us that tackling hate and intolerance and that ‘cutting out the things that make us fear or get angry with one another’ is a top priority.

Our survey found that social media is having a negative effect on some relationships. People said ‘Nobody talks face-to-face anymore’. You are concerned that rumours and misinformation is replacing proper conversation, and that people get the wrong end of the stick about others.

Our focus groups told us that there should be more opportunities to hear community voices through informal groups or formal, structured meetings. This would **help to improve relationships in local areas** and, potentially, with authorities.

#### **What we will do:**

- Secure and develop resources to deliver education programmes in schools and youth settings that help build skills to manage conflict and think critically.
- Deliver education and training programmes for voluntary, community and statutory partners to increase their capacity to hold difficult conversations on issues relating to intolerance, hate and extremism with a focus on schools and those working in community settings.
- Engage community partners to help identify issues causing tensions and impacting cohesion through attendance at our community committees and through regular audits with a specific focus on minority and under-represented community groups.
- Actively seek to engage widely across communities where tensions and issues exist going beyond ‘community leaders’.

### **3. Build and promote good relations in our neighbourhoods**

**We pledge to strengthen relationships between people of all backgrounds, building resilience to hate and intolerance and promoting democratic and civic participation with a place-based approach to delivery.**

The survey and focus groups that we ran showed a clear desire to **build and promote good relations in our neighbourhoods**. Whilst 86% of people in Leeds feel that people get on well or extremely well, confidence in those relationships differs depending on age and background.

It is important to you that people from different backgrounds have the same life chances for them and their family. It is **easier for communities to get along with one another** when people feel they are on a level playing field and are being treated fairly. You also told us that being able to trust local services such as the police, council and health providers are key and you want more opportunities to ensure residents voices are heard, and informing how those services are delivered for you.

**When we asked you what impacts how well people get on with one another**, you told us that COVID, the cost of living and austerity have reduced the number of places, spaces and the times that people come together. Ultimately, your neighbourhoods are important to you, and as well as a clean, safe and welcoming area to live in, you want a sense of neighbourliness too where everyone looks out for one another.

Importantly, you told us that volunteering is important and you're willing to play a role. You want more support and opportunity so you can help support your community.

#### **What we will do:**

- Work with community partners and individuals to promote active citizenship with a focus on increasing representation and civic participation.
- Consider how local community partners can become more involved with community committees.
- Work with those partners consistently to ensure that the voices of groups and individuals in our neighbourhoods are being heard and listened to, primarily through third sector partnership arrangements in the city.
- Empower our local partners in the delivery of events and activities to bring the community together, removing barriers and providing infrastructure and support where it is needed.
- Support the development of organisations working with underrepresented groups to increase their engagement and involvement.
- Work with our community partners to provide training to increase their knowledge, skills and capacity to tackle hate and intolerance, and promote social cohesion.
- Develop a network of Social Cohesion Champions across the city. These champions will help us drive our work forward and hold us to account on delivering our ambitions.

## **4. Develop our sense of belonging**

**We will work to raise awareness and understanding of diverse communities across Leeds and enhance access to education, skills, and employment opportunities for everyone.**

The survey and focus groups we delivered showed a clear desire to **develop a sense of belonging** for people who work and live in Leeds.

When we asked **what impacts how well people get on with one another**, you told us that prejudice and fear of the other plays a role. 'People are scared...this isn't down to intentional prejudice; it just feels safer sometimes to stick to what you know'. To tackle this our focus groups told us that people need to feel confident to ask questions, explore difference and be confident to make new connections.

Our survey told us that you feel people should be welcome to our city but that language can be a barrier. You told us that people should be supported to learn English to give them the best chance of understanding and communicating with others and feeling they are able to play a full part in their community.

You told us that respect between people of all cultures, age, sexual orientation and ethnicity is **important to you and your family in making your community more cohesive**. Forming friendships and developing an understanding of people from different backgrounds is important. You want to see more events, spaces and opportunities to come together with people from different backgrounds – not just to improve cohesion; but to combat isolation and loneliness too.

#### **What we will do:**

- Create and promote volunteering opportunities that bring people together with a focus on younger and older people, including opportunities to bring those groups together.
- Support and promote initiatives that encourage individuals, schools and groups to visits to different places of worship and cultural significance.
- Work with our schools to promote intercultural learning, including work to support and include parents from ethnically diverse backgrounds.
- Support and promote events and initiatives that highlight the positive contribution made by different communities and ensure they have wide cross-community appeal.
- Help facilitate and support events that bring communities together creating opportunities to promote new and different exchanges that bridge understanding and give opportunities to bond.
- Promote and encourage English language learning for those who do not speak, read and write in English or who have a low level of understanding.
- Target skills and employment programmes at those communities that are under-represented and who may need greater opportunities to overcome barriers to entry.

## **6. Cohesion in context – connection to other strategies**

This social cohesion strategy sets out our vision and commitment to creating a city in which every person feels they are welcome and that they belong. Our goal is for Leeds to be a place where people build positive relationships with others, and actively participate in their communities.

Achieving this vision requires more than just this strategy. It is part of a broader ambition - the Best City Ambition - and a range of related strategies and workstreams. Together, these efforts aim to address inequality, hate, and discrimination whilst promoting a strong sense of pride, belonging, and connection among Leeds residents. The strategies described below are integral to the success of the Stronger Leeds strategy and we will therefore be working closely with partners leading on these and draw on their expertise and resources to fulfil our Stronger Leeds priorities and activities.

## Leeds Best City Ambition

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 this Ambition are three key pillars that focus on the most impactful areas for improving lives in Leeds by 2030 and beyond. These pillars address the significant challenges we face while leveraging the best opportunities to create meaningful change.

The Best City Ambition seeks to bring together organisations and local communities across Leeds, helping them understand and contribute to making Leeds the best city in the UK. Every contribution, no matter how small, plays a vital role in this effort. Although the Ambition is not a delivery plan, it is supported by a range of essential strategies and is increasingly integrated into the business plans of key organisations across the city.

The three pillars of the Best City Ambition are:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Inclusive Growth
- Zero Carbon

## Leeds Community Safety Strategy

Safer Leeds is the city's statutory Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and comprises of a wide range of organisations including Leeds City Council, West Yorkshire Police, Public Health, West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service; West Yorkshire Probation Services, HMP Service and the Voluntary & Community Sector.

The overarching vision for Safer Leeds is:

**“People in Leeds are safe and feel safe in their homes, in the streets, and the places they go.”**

The CSP's activity contributes to the wider aims of the Best City Ambition and will sit alongside this Social Cohesion Strategy. The strategy sets out how it will be:

- Working with and for communities, families and individuals, so people are safe and feel safe in their homes, in the streets, and the places they go.
- Focusing on early intervention and problem solving in partnership to deliver effective community safety related solutions.
- Identifying and utilising the contribution and value to be gained from the many community-based assets existing across the city with a focus on building increased neighbourhood resilience and self-reliance.

The strategy allows the CSP to focus on local issues that affect feelings of safety and security including emerging/ongoing concerns around nuisance, crime, or the local environment. It will develop plans and interventions to have localised aspects that are flexible to respond to such issues and potential change, through:

- Involving local individuals and residents in discussions and decisions, through a range of mediums including social media.
- Coordinating rollout of services to respond to any increasing concerns or tensions to prevent issues escalating and ensuring appropriate interventions across agencies with the communities affected, including communities of identity/interests/neighbourhoods.
- Developing interventions and strategies that can be implemented across different areas or communities as priority areas change.

## **Leeds Hate Crime Strategy**

The Leeds Hate Crime Strategy sets out our collective commitment to tackling hate in all its forms, developed closely with key partners, third-sector organisations, and communities. This strategy is not just about policy; it is about people. Every resident of Leeds has the right to feel safe in their home, workplace, and community. Where hate crimes or hate incidents occur, it is our intention to develop individuals' confidence to challenge them and report them to the key partners responsible for the delivery of this strategy.

The strategy is focussed on 5 key priorities:

- Building our understanding of hate crime
- Preventing hate crime
- Increasing the reporting of hate crime
- Responding to hate crime in our communities
- Improving support for victims of hate crime

The vision of the Leeds Hate Crime Strategy is to prevent where possible hate incidents occurring and reduce the number of hate incidents overall; where they do occur ensure that victims, witnesses, and third parties are fully supported and that offenders are held accountable and brought to justice.

## **Equality and Diversity**

Leeds has updated and renewed its approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion across the city. Recently, a new vision statement and action plan have been introduced to accelerate progress in these areas alongside this strategy.

This approach reflects the growing societal recognition of equality issues, especially in response to challenges such as austerity, Brexit, COVID-19, and the rising cost of living, which have disproportionately impacted marginalised communities. As the city becomes more



diverse, there is increasing public demand for faster progress in tackling discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities for all.

While meeting its legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010, the vision statement highlights Leeds' ambition to go even further. This commitment is embedded within the action plan, which focuses on three key areas: internal initiatives for staff, improved monitoring of service delivery outcomes, and greater engagement with the wider community.

The development of this vision and action plan involved extensive consultation with various stakeholders, including equality groups and staff networks. This refreshed approach complements existing efforts in equality, diversity, and inclusion, with specific priorities reviewed and reported on annually. The action plan aligns with our statutory Equality Improvement Priorities, scheduled for review in 2025, and supports the broader aim of making Leeds the best city it can be.

## **Migration Strategy**

The Migration Strategy sets out our long-term strategic direction on migration which aims to ensure people who migrate to Leeds are able to establish their lives quickly and successfully. Our approach aims to benefit all the citizens and residents of Leeds. Migration is a key theme to the Council's approach to its locality working and is an essential component of Safer Stronger Communities' programme of work, bringing together a range of projects and activities to improve community cohesion engagement and development.

The vision for this strategy is:

**“Leeds is a welcoming and compassionate city for new and existing communities, a place where people feel safe and connected; contributions are valued and celebrated; and individuals, families and communities can reach their full potential.”**

The council recognises the challenges in ensuring fair access for all in the city and we continue to strive to tackle inequalities and improve cohesion and participation through key priorities:

- Improve access to services through improved value-added accountability such as the use effective methods and resources to increase service user understanding of rights, entitlements and responsibilities.
- Change attitudes and behaviours through creating a culture of welcome and compassion and enhancing understanding of diverse communities.
- Increase awareness and understanding through communications and engagement.
- Strengthen resilience and build capacity through increasing opportunities, supporting the citywide approach to learning English in Leeds and develop and contribute to models which build knowledge, experience and skills to facilitate better informed social networks.
- Strong partnership working together as a city and enabling an effective citywide response.

## **Asset Based Community Development**

Committed to shifting power to people and supporting communities to thrive, we have funded the spread of an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) model in Leeds for the last 11 years and are seen as one of the national trailblazers for this way of working.

ABCD is a neighbourhood-based approach to community building focusing on what's **STRONG** in communities instead of what's **WRONG** and needs fixing. It recognises that everyone has something to contribute, that everyone has gifts, skills and strengths.

Key to the approach is the belief that given the tools and the opportunity, small groups of individuals can change the things that they believe need changing in their community better than anyone else.

The council funds ABCD community 'pathfinder' schemes across the city, each site is delivered in partnership with the Third Sector and comprises a Community Builder to work in neighbourhoods to discover, connect and mobilise people's capabilities and the community assets, bringing people together to kick start possibilities and ideas.

The ABCD in Leeds model supports the Best City Ambition which puts an emphasis on working with people in an asset-based way, investing in prevention and building community capacity, and supports our Team Leeds approach to community power – empowering people to generate the positive changes they want to see, enabling communities to thrive and tackle systemic inequalities.

We have seen that this way of working creates an environment that fosters social connection and meaningful friendships. The building of inclusive and equitable relationships, reciprocity and acts of kindness.

People have reported feeling connected to where they live, a sense of belonging, and community spirit. We have seen that it improves not only the health and wellbeing of the people who live there, it sparks people empowerment, socially led action, and long-term sustainable change that improves community resilience and social cohesion.

## **Intercultural Cities**

In Leeds, we are proud of our status as an Intercultural City. Intercultural Cities (ICC) is a Council of Europe flagship programme. It seeks to explore the potential of an intercultural approach to integration in communities with culturally diverse populations. The cities participating in the programme review their governance, policies, discourse and practices from an intercultural point of view.

The Council of Europe has defined the intercultural city as encompassing people with different nationality, origin, language or religion/ belief, where:

- Political leaders and most citizens regard diversity positively, as a resource.
- The city actively combats discrimination and adapts its governance, institutions and services to the needs of a diverse population.
- The city has a strategy and tools to deal with diversity and cultural conflict and to enhance participation.
- The city encourages greater mixing and meaningful interaction between diverse groups in public spaces.

Following a visit and assessment by a Council of Europe team in 2020, Leeds was officially recognised as an Intercultural City.

The ICC team praised the council's efforts to combat discrimination, promote equality, support and welcome newcomers, and our governance approach to diversity and inclusion, among other achievements. While highlighting our many strengths, the report also provided recommendations for further advancing intercultural competence in Leeds, focusing on areas such as education and strengthening our commitment to interculturalism through initiatives like this strategy.

## **Anti-Social Behaviour**

Leeds City Council is committed to promoting community cohesion by effectively addressing anti-social behaviour (ASB) through a balanced approach that combines prevention, early intervention, and enforcement if required. The ASB strategy outlines targeted interventions and collaborative efforts with the community safety partnership, including community groups, to mitigate behaviours that disrupt social harmony.

By integrating the ASB strategy into our broader community safety framework, we ensure a holistic approach that not only addresses immediate safety concerns but also promotes long-term community resilience and trust. This synergy between the ASB and the Social Cohesion Strategy emphasises our commitment to creating a supportive environment where all residents and visitors to Leeds can thrive.

## **Leeds Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2030**

As we grow up and we grow old, the people around us, the places we live in, the work we do, the way we move, the time we spend playing and relaxing, and the type of support we receive, will keep us healthier for longer. This is a central part of the Leeds Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which is one of three pillar strategies contributing to the delivery of the Best City Ambition. It aims to break the link between poverty and poor health, identifying twelve priorities where working together with partners and communities, we can make the biggest difference.

The Strategy sets a clear vision for Leeds to be a ‘healthy and caring city for all ages, where people who are the poorest improve their health the fastest’.

In our city, health and wellbeing starts with people, and everything is connected. Strong communities and a diverse city go hand-in hand. People’s physical and mental health and wellbeing is improved when they have access to quality services and opportunities to connect with others. We want people to live in thriving communities that they feel proud of. Furthermore, we also need to continue to listen and act on diverse voices, which helps us to create strong communities and meet the needs of those at highest risk of poor wellbeing.

The Stronger Leeds strategy will be central in supporting the delivery of achieving our ambition to be the Best City for Health and Wellbeing and building accessible, inclusive, thriving communities where people live happier, healthier lives, do the best for one another and provide the best care possible.

## **Age Friendly Leeds**

Age Friendly Leeds has a longstanding ambition to be the Best City to Grow Old in: a place where people in later life (age 50+) age well, lead healthy, connected, fulfilling, independent lives and are valued, feel respected and are seen as the assets they are.

Age Friendly Leeds plays a preventative role to increase the proportion of our lives that we spend in good health in later life.

Age friendly places, communities, and services support everyone, including those with health challenges, to lead vibrant, connected, fulfilling, and independent lives.

As a result, this helps to prevent, reduce, and delay the need for reactive services. ‘Age Friendly Leeds’ is identified as a key enabler contributing to delivering the ambitions across all three pillars in the Best City Ambition.

Our Age Friendly Leeds Strategy sets out our approach and plan to achieve our ambition across a number of key topics (Active Included and Respected, Employment & Learning, Healthy & Independent Ageing, Housing, Public and Civic Spaces & Travel & Road Safety) with cross-cutting themes that underpin our approach. This includes a focus on embedding opportunities to increase social contact and intergenerational connections in later life into all of our policies and services.

## **Leeds Volunteering Strategy**

The strategy's vision is for Leeds to be the best city for volunteering. A city that celebrates volunteering in all its forms, where it is easy for people to find ways to make a difference and get involved, and where all partners work together to support an innovative and diverse volunteering environment.

The strategy seeks to set a course for developing both informal and formal volunteering. As informal volunteering is less structured and often happens 'below the radar', we acknowledge that there is further to travel in understanding our city's strengths and areas for growth in this area. In developing this strategy, Leeds Volunteer Managers' network has drawn on evidence about national and local trends and consulted widely with volunteers, volunteer managers and with partners.

Volunteering plays a key role within the ambitions of the Stronger Leeds Strategy as follows:

- Volunteering encompasses the key principles of the Stronger Leeds Strategy - participation, relationships and belonging
- A key objective of the strategy is to further diversify our volunteer base, bringing together people who may not typically spend time with one another, creating social cohesion. Volunteers from diverse communities (including those who are underrepresented) benefit from a sense of connection and belonging and are empowered to influence change.
- The development of a city-wide identity for volunteering will develop a strong sense of community amongst volunteers, establishing new relationships and a sense of belonging
- Increasing the number of volunteers in Leeds enables increased participation in social action, creating a sense of empowerment and ownership within communities. Volunteers are motivated to 'give back' to their communities and a strong volunteering infrastructure enables this
- Volunteering is critical in supporting people's progression to education, employment and new skills. Volunteering removes barriers to employment by increasing confidence, enhancing physical and emotional wellbeing, providing development opportunities, improving spoken English and the opportunity to build professional skills.

## Child Friendly Leeds

Leeds has a bold ambition - to be the **best city for children and young people to grow up in**. A place where children are valued, supported, enjoy living and can look forward to a bright future – a truly **child-friendly city**.

From the influential first years of life, to a child's learning, and the care and love children receive growing up - these things that shape our communities. In Leeds, we have five outcomes that all children and young people:

1. Are safe from harm
2. Do well at all levels of learning and have skills for life

3. Enjoy healthy lives
4. Have fun growing up
5. Are active citizens who feel they have a voice and influence

Inspiring the Leeds Children and Young People's Plan 2023-2028 to make Leeds an inclusive and welcoming city where children live in loving and nurturing families are the **12 wishes**. Capturing the views of over 80,000 children and young people through consultations and surveys across the city, the top issues and priorities formed the refreshed 12 wishes for the city.

Wish 4 states: "Differences are celebrated in Leeds so children and young people feel accepted for who they are. They do not experience bullying and discrimination." To develop a truly child-friendly city, we must ensure Leeds is an inclusive city and that people in Leeds have a better understanding of diversity and therefore celebrate differences in abilities, ethnicity, family background, language, religion, sex and opinions. Children and young people feel accepted, included and valued. They have a greater awareness of their rights not to be bullied or discriminated against and know what to do if it happens.

## **Parks and Green Spaces Strategy**

This strategy sets out a vision for Leeds City Council's Parks and Countryside Service, and the actions that we will undertake to deliver that vision over the next 10 years. It focusses on how local public green spaces such as parks, nature reserves and cemeteries, and related facilities (such as playgrounds, tennis courts, animal attractions, footpaths and cafes) will be managed going forward.

In recent times, and especially during the coronavirus pandemic, people in the UK have increasingly come to recognise the value of urban public green space, particularly its huge benefits to health and wellbeing, wildlife and the environment.

Amongst the priorities and linked closely with the ambitions of the Stronger Leeds strategy, this strategy will address access for all - ensuring that parks and green spaces are accessible to everyone; culture - providing exciting, diverse, interesting and enjoyable green spaces that reflect the history and culture of their local communities; and working with communities - having a positive, open, helpful and collaborative approach to undertaking the work of the Green Spaces service.

## 7. Team Leeds

When we asked what had helped you build a sense of pride and belonging to Leeds.

You said:

- **Friendships** matters most with **family** close behind
- **The city's diverse communities** is something you feel proud to be a part of
- You value **quality of life and opportunities in education and employment**
- **People coming together to make a difference on the things that matter most to them**, was also a priority

Team Leeds is about supporting one another to **make Leeds the best it can be**.

It is about sharing ideas and learning, working in genuine partnership, being ambitious about our collective social, economic and environmental impact, and using our buildings, assets and other resources more collectively and creatively to deliver on shared goals.

We want to build **Team Leeds** – made up all of the people who live or work here, and those who champion all of the distinct and diverse parts of the whole city nationally and internationally.

Everyone in Leeds coming together to play their part is how we will achieve our ambitions and be in a strong position to adapt to whatever the future may hold.

**As a council** we will seek to mainstream cohesion across our work as an organisation. From cohesive practice to policy that considers cohesion in all its delivery – we will make this

everyone's business. As ambassadors for our communities, our elected members will act as champions for cohesion and challenge us to do better as a city.

**As a partner** we will work with our colleagues across the Leeds Anchor institutions networks, our partners in the voluntary, education, health and wider public and private sectors; to shape our work and ensure that our plans and delivery are joined up and delivering best value for our communities.

**As an employer** we will promote equalities, good relations and cohesion priorities across our workforce. Change comes from us all and as Team Leeds, we are committed to making our city and our place the best place to work, live and grow together.

**We all have a role to play.** The implementation of this strategy will require cross-sector collaboration, leveraging existing resources across government departments, council services, the third sector, and other statutory partners in the city. Commitment to and investment in local initiatives and the priorities identified will be necessary to the success of the strategy and to sustain long-term impact. Whilst we recognise that there is much to celebrate in Leeds, there will be a need to explore further funding opportunities to realise our ambition to have more cohesive communities in Leeds.

From our research and your feedback, here are some of the things we think we can all do to help make others feel they are part of this city and build that sense of pride and belonging in Leeds.

1. Welcome people to our city and make them feel they belong.
2. Recognise the strengths in diversity and celebrate it where we see it.
3. Listen hard - even when you disagree. Try to see their point of view and empathise.
4. Stand up to intolerance, prejudice and hate. Where you feel safe to do so, challenge those jokes and ideas that can be so pernicious and divisive.
5. Get to know your neighbours – it starts local.
6. Be active in our communities. Whether volunteering or taking on a civic role, to make a difference.
7. Get involved. Attend and promote events and activities that are different and allow us to try something new.
8. Promote positive stories and views about all our communities.

This is OUR city. Let's make it all our business to make it the best it can be for all of us.

#TEAMLEEDS



## **8. Managing and measuring progress: Governance and accountability**

Given the links to, and relevance of this strategy, to the Safer Leeds Strategy it is appropriate for the Stronger Leeds strategy to report into the city's Community Safety Partnership, Safer Leeds Executive, to ensure coherence with wider work taking place across the city to build a safer, stronger city. Safer Leeds Executive will oversee the work and the action plan that will accompany the Stronger Leeds strategy. The Safer Leeds Executive is chaired by the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment.

We will undertake work to develop a measurement tool that tracks our progress against the Stronger Leeds Strategy. This will sit alongside West Yorkshire Combined Authority's 'Your Views' survey that will include a measurement of cohesion. The work of this strategy will be taken forward by the Safer Stronger Communities team working closely with those partners involved in facilitating and bringing communities together.

A detailed action plan outlining how progress against the four priorities will be achieved will be produced and reviewed on an annual basis. Given the ambitions of the strategy, we will initially prioritise those actions and activities that will make the most impact on social cohesion.

There is a need to make this strategy an evolving area of work as opposed to how we see it here and now. We are operating in a dynamic and ever-changing and complicated world so the Stronger Leeds action plan will be a 'live document' where new actions and priorities may be introduced if circumstances require us to focus on events and emerging issues that impact social cohesion.

## 9. Appendix

**Our survey and focus group findings in more detail.**

### Key findings

1. **How well do you think people from different backgrounds get along with each other in your local area?**
  - Overall, 86% people felt that people get on extremely well or well.
  - White people feel most confident (89%) followed by Asian and Asian British (83%) respondents.
  - The data shows that the older people get, the more positive people feel those relationships are (with a 1% exception aged 40-49).

**There are some things people say make it easier for communities to get along with each other. We asked you to tell us what you think, and to rank those.**

**You feel that the most important things are:**

- People from different backgrounds should have the **same chances in life** for them and family.
- Being **willing to help one another out** – regardless of your background.
- A community where you all **feel safe**.
- **Trust in local services** like the council, the police and health providers.
- A community where people **have respect for one another's' cultures** was also a priority.

Our focus groups told us that a good neighbourhood:

- **looks and feels clean and well looked after with parks and green spaces that are accessible to all and safe.**
2. **What is important to you and your family in helping make your community feel cohesive?**
- **Respect between all people** whatever their religion, age, sexual orientation, gender or ethnicity
  - **Tackling hate and intolerance** is a top priority. Understanding communities and **cutting out that things that make us fear or get angry with one another.**

This is closely followed by:

- The ability to **form friendships and develop an understanding of those from different backgrounds**

Our focus groups told us that:

- A neighbourhood that **feels comfortable for all** and that feels **neighbourly is also key**

3. **What impacts how well people get on with each other?**

- **Anti-social behaviour** is a real challenge and received the highest number of responses.
- The **cost of living** has made it difficult for people to join in with activities/events.
- **Language barriers** can prevent people connecting with one another.
- **Fly tipping** and **general misuse of public spaces** affects how you feel about those living around you and their lack of respect for the area.
- 32% respondents felt that **racism is an issue** and 24% were **concerned about Hate Crime**

Our focus groups told us:

- **Prejudice and fear of the other** plays a role

***“People are scared of what they don’t know and this isn’t down to intentional prejudice, it just feel safer sometimes to stick to what you know”***

- People are **not always ready or able to accept another culture** and that **knowledge about other cultures is helpful.**

***“My neighbour and I speak different languages - we communicate through hands ....but some people don't have the confidence to do that”***

- Others felt that austerity and the cost of living has impacted the spaces, places and events that give people the opportunity to come together.

***‘There aren't a lot of opportunity for people to come together/mix and engage based on common interests’.***

- Some feel that social media is impacting people's connection to one another:

***‘People spend too much time on social media, so they don't go out and talk to each other, there's no interaction any more people don't have the get up and go they used to have’***

- Some do not feel safe letting their children and young people play out for fear of abuse and violence.

***Young people told us:***

- **Social media** is having a **negative effect** on some relationships

***‘People are on their phones all the time’.***

***‘Nobody talks face to face any more’.***

#### **4. What could we do to improve relationships in our local areas?**

- **Community events and festivals** that bring people of all backgrounds together
- **Reaching out** to get to know your neighbours
- **Volunteering and taking action** in your neighbourhood

**Our focus groups told us that:**

- People need to **feel confident to be able to ask questions, say hello and feel part of a group**

***“There could be mini markets, busking/singing and dancing; anything that interrupts the normal flow and encourages people to interact and socialise.”***

- **Universal activities** such as **sports** means **language is less important**

**They also told us that:**

- there should be **more opportunities to hear community voices** through engagement event and activities such as informal or structured meetings and forums

- **Events, activities and spaces that are free** are important because people don't have the money due to the cost-of-living crisis

**The young people we spoke to felt that there needs to be:**

- More opportunities for **young people of different backgrounds to come together**
- **Inclusion** of people of all backgrounds **to combat isolation and loneliness**

**'Communication and inclusion – [people] having someone to go to, family or not'**

**'Acts of kindness'**