Leeds City Council
Areas of Research Interest
2024-25

Introduction and purpose

The Leeds City Council Areas of Research Interest (ARI) set out the council's knowledge needs which vary in size and complexity. Policy and service change at the local authority level is often developed at pace, informed by internal research or practitioner experience, and may be driven by national government, community demand or other external factors. Within this context, ARI are intended to stimulate and support stronger collaboration with academic institutions in the city – focused on the biggest issues which affect the communities we serve and the future success of Leeds.

The first set of Leeds City Council ARI, which were developed closely with the University of Leeds, were published in 2022 under the themes of Culture, Digital, Food and Inclusive Growth, with Place being added in 2023. This partnership approach to developing ARI has been acknowledged by other local authorities and academic institutions seeking to learn from the Leeds experience.

This year, the 2024/25 ARI have been re-shaped to reflect the priorities in our refreshed Best City Ambition. The Ambition's purpose is to set out the vision for the future of Leeds, focussed on tackling poverty and inequality and improving quality of life for everyone across the whole city. The priorities set out within the Ambition are focussed on the three interrelated pillars of Health and Wellbeing, Inclusive Growth and Zero Carbon. Although the ARI have been developed under these headings, there are interdependencies between them which are crucial to understanding the city and reducing inequalities – therefore we would encourage consideration of our ARI in the round.

The Best City Ambition also promotes the importance of Team Leeds – the city coming together – to achieve shared goals. Over time and as our approach matures, we would like more partners to have the opportunity to contribute to shaping ARI underpinning the Ambition.

The Leeds City Council ARI will be published annually on the Leeds Observatory, with any additional research needs and questions being updated as they arise. The council's approach to using ARI to set out knowledge needs is growing and will continue to evolve. We welcome any feedback and you can get in touch at policy@leeds.gov.uk

Policy research needs

The sections below set out an overarching summary of each area of research interest and highlight a range of specific research questions for 2024-25. The specific research questions give examples of key evidence needs, but are not exhaustive of all research questions across the council and city. Additionally, there are some areas listed below that are still under development and will be updated.

As noted above, the council's interests are broad and dynamic, and evolve over time, so we are always interested in hearing about new research opportunities which might be relevant to us. For each area we have listed some key contacts who would be happy to discuss.

For a broader introductory discussion, or for help navigating the council, you can contact policy@leeds.gov.uk

Health and Wellbeing

Key Contact – Tony Cooke, Chief Officer Health Partnerships (Anthony.Cooke@leeds.gov.uk)

Our ambition statement is:

"Leeds will be a healthy and caring city for everyone: where those who are most likely to experience poverty improve their mental and physical health the fastest, with health and care inequalities reducing, and people being supported to thrive from early years to later life."

Our key research headlines are:

1. **Work and health: the impact of employment challenges across all groups**
   - How can we achieve successful employment opportunities for inclusion groups (such as people with a learning disability, people with mental health issues and people who are neurodiverse)?
   - What locally-led employment support interventions can best support over 50s to maintain or re-enter good work in the latter part of their working life?
   - How can employment and skills development opportunities be embedded into statutory social care support in the city? How would this impact on wider health outcomes?
   - What is the impact of paid employment on people's access to effective and affordable care and support? Exploring how we can inform system reform to build independence in a sustainable way.

2. **Impact of future population trends and patterns on wider health and wellbeing outcomes, services and the economy**
   - What is the likely future demand for services based on key future population statistics, including patterns around ageing, migration, population growth in areas of deprivation?
   - What is the likely impact on the economy and on demand for services from the increasing number of children and younger people living in IMD decile 1? What is the impact on services in increasing mental health issues as this cohort ages?

   (Further Children and Young People and Best Start ARI are in development)

3. **Housing and wider health outcomes**
   - What is the impact of increasing numbers of people living in less secure private rented accommodation on wider determinants of health?
   - Evaluation of the city's Selective Licensing approach to private rented sector housing as a means of improving housing quality and therefore health and wellbeing, educational outcomes etc.

4. **Integration of health and social care and community support in reducing health inequalities**
   - What preventative and protective cross-system methods could reduce prevalence of poor mental health in children and young people? What methods would best improve outcomes and therefore reduce demand on services?
   - What impact can service delivery in community settings have on health and wellbeing outcomes? Cost-benefit analysis. For example, would NHS Health Checks in community settings increase uptake for those currently not accessing the programme?

   (Further Adult Social Care and Marmot City ARI are currently in development)

Inclusive Growth

Key Contact – Fiona Bolam, Head of Economic Policy (Fiona.Bolam@leeds.gov.uk)

Our ambition statement is:

"Leeds will be a place where we create growth in our economy that works for everyone, where people and businesses can thrive, and we work together to tackle poverty and inequality."

1. **Business and regeneration**
   - What factors most affect a local centre's resilience to economic shocks, and ability to capitalise on changing/more-localised working patterns post-Covid.
   - What support is needed to enable current SME businesses in Leeds become more productive? What technologies, processes and innovations would make the biggest impact and how can businesses be best encouraged to adopt these?
   - How can Leeds businesses secure more investment to start, grow and scale?
   - What are the opportunities for Leeds in the green / low carbon economy over the next 20 years? Where can Leeds have comparative advantage as the economy adapts to a greener future?

2. **Cultural Compact for Leeds**
   - Opportunities around the development of a Leeds Cultural Compact – building a strong post-Leeds 2023 development plan for culture in the city.
   - Understanding the ecology of the Leeds cultural sector – potentially through a sector survey.

   (*Further Museums, Galleries and Heritage ARI are currently in development*)

3. **Welfare support offer and financial resilience**
   - What is the welfare offer across the city? How can local services better integrate to respond and reduce inequality? How could a welfare system that was flexible around the needs of places work in Leeds?
   - What are the real and perceived business barriers to employing more people from some of our most disadvantaged areas in Leeds?

4. **Corporate Parenting – improving outcomes for care leavers around education and employment.**
   - Understanding the barriers to entering the workforce/finding fulfilling employment faced by care leavers.
   - Understanding the challenges faced by employers to sustainably recruiting care leavers who go on to have success in the workplace. Identifying good practice and potential strategies from within Leeds and from other local authorities.

Zero Carbon

Key Contact – Polly Cook, Chief Officer Climate, Energy & Green Spaces (Polly.Cook@leeds.gov.uk)

Our ambition statement is:

"Leeds aims to become the first net zero city in the UK, rapidly reducing carbon emissions and reversing the decline in biodiversity, while supporting people to make more sustainable choices which can improve their standard of living."

1. **Developing inclusive public spaces**
   - How are our parks and green spaces being used? For example, what information can we learn about time of day and type of usage, destination vs travel-through walkway etc?
   - What visitor attraction user information can we gather to develop more inclusive and well utilised spaces?
   - How can we develop inclusive green and play spaces that support a range of equality, diversity and inclusion characteristics? For example, how can we support neurodiversity, sensory impairments, and physical disabilities in joint play spaces?

2. **Adaptation in parks and public spaces for future climate impacts**
   - What adaptation measures can you take in parks to respond to future climate impacts, for instance, heatwaves, drought, branch drop, floods etc. What audit process could be used on an ongoing basis?
   - How can playgrounds be adapted for climate (such as metal play equipment in heat)?
   - Understanding the impact, and potential trade-offs, of different interventions we make to tackle climate change and improve the environment. E.g. flood risk vs habitat management, effects of relaxed mowing etc.

3. **Biodiversity and animal welfare**
   - Animal conservation and welfare across zoological sites (Lotherton and Tropical World) - strengthening zoological research initiatives, answering specific research questions to meet zoo license requirements).
   - Baseline biodiversity - how are we doing across the whole city? Can we gain more information about net gain? Are we able to map out biodiversity across Leeds?

4. **Personal choice and zero carbon**
   - What are the most effective ways for the council to build trust in the advice it provides – more effectively influencing decision making around sustainable choices. E.g. on green home improvement, food and diet options, EV vehicles and charging/travel.

Team Leeds

Key Contact – Mike Eakins, Head of Policy (Michael.Eakins@leeds.gov.uk)

Team Leeds 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. Team Leeds can be demonstrated through many different means, but our 6 principles help to articulate the Team Leeds approach. These include being Good Neighbours, Community Power, Innovation Impact, Healthy Society, Social Responsibility and Strength Based Approaches.

1. **Digital Inclusion and Artificial Intelligence**
   - AI ethics - AI usage in local government functions and alignment with citizen expectations.
   - How can AI/tech-assistance be used to reduce workforce pressures, to improve city-wide outcomes?
   - What are the localised and individual impacts of digital exclusion or data poverty on health and wellbeing in our increasingly digital city? What effect does someone becoming digitally connected have on their health and wellbeing in Leeds?
   - How can we support SMEs to adopt AI to benefit from some of the productivity gains being seen by large companies who have been able to adopt AI?

2. **Community Power and social assets**
   - What factors enable or inhibit local services / institutions to embrace community power? How can we grow understanding and enhance the facilitation of greater community empowerment and control?
   - How do we effectively reduce/mitigate for antisocial behaviour challenges in parks and public spaces? Can enhancing community ownership of spaces play a meaningful role in reducing antisocial behaviour?