

Leeds Drug and Alcohol Progress Report 2023/24

1 Introduction

This report outlines the progress of the Leeds Drug and Alcohol Partnership, between April 2023-March 2024, against the priorities set out in the national drug strategy, *From harm to hope*, as well as local priorities in Leeds. The report includes an overview of the:

- Leeds Drug and Alcohol Partnership and the progress it has made over the last year
- Conclusions and recommendations from the Leeds Drug and Alcohol Joint Needs Assessment
- Development of the Leeds Drug and Alcohol Strategy and Action Plan
- Service user involvement
- Continued investment from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, including an overview of what has been funded in year 3 (2024-25) of the Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant
- Progress against key drug and alcohol outcome measures
- Feedback from teams in the drug and alcohol service that have benefitted from the new funding, as well as service user views
- Feedback from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (following a visit to Leeds on 17 June 2024), and Dame Carol Black (following her visit to Leeds on 9 September 2024).

2 Leeds Drug and Alcohol Partnership

Following the publication of the Government's drug strategy, *From harm to hope*, every local authority in England was required to set up a Combatting Drugs Partnership. In Leeds this is known as the Leeds Drug and Alcohol Partnership (LDAP).

Set up in 2022, the LDAP provides strong strategic leadership and supports effective partnership working around drugs and alcohol in Leeds. It reports to the Leeds Health and Wellbeing Board, Safer Leeds Executive and Children and Families Trust Board. It also links with a West Yorkshire-wide meeting, led by the Mayor's Policing and Crime Team.

Chaired by the Director of Public Health for Leeds (as the appointed Senior Responsible Owner), and with a membership spanning representatives from Leeds City Council, health, community safety/ criminal justice, and other relevant sectors, the LDAP meets several times a year, with good attendance. Over the last year, the LDAP has met three times – on 23 November 2023, 28 March 2024 and 18 July 2024.

At the LDAP meeting, held on 23 November 2023, the main agenda item was a group discussion on the proposal for the year 3 (2024-25) Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant. In addition, the group:

- Heard updates on the work of the Partnership's subgroups
- Heard from the Public Health Intelligence Team on the latest progress against the metrics in the Drug and Alcohol Dashboards
- Discussed meaningful involvement of people with lived experience.

At the LDAP meeting, held on 28 March 2024, the main agenda item was a group discussion on the draft of the Leeds Drug and Alcohol Strategy and Action Plan 2025-30. In addition, the group also:

- Heard updates on the work of the Partnership's subgroups
- Was given an update on the Leeds proposal for the year 3 (2024-25) Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant

- Was given an update on the Leeds submission to the Department for Health and Social Care's consultation on expanding access to naloxone.

At the LDAP meeting, held on 18 July 2024, the main agenda item was a group discussion on equality diversity and inclusion. In addition, the group:

- Heard updates on the work of the Partnership's subgroups
- Was given an update on the Leeds Combatting Drugs Partnership Self-Assessment submission
- Heard about the success of the recent (17 June 2024) visit by officials from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities
- Discussed the draft of the Synthetic Opioids Incident Response Plan.

3 The Leeds Drug and Alcohol Joint Needs Assessment

The Leeds Drug and Alcohol Joint Needs Assessment reviewed and analysed available local drug and alcohol data, to outline where Leeds stands on key metrics and identify where to target resources for greatest impact. This initial assessment was an attempt to understand the baseline of where local need, partnership, activity, and performance were, and drew on relevant partnerships and pieces of work (such as local drugs market profiles, community safety strategic assessments and Joint Strategic Assessments) across the public health, primary and secondary care, and crime and justice sectors.

Limitations in the data restricted certain sections. Two areas of particular concern were:

- Limited up-to-date data on population-level prevalence of drugs use in Leeds, including the proportion of people using the most common substances
- Limited criminal justice data, including police activity against county lines and other organised crime at a Leeds level.

Close partnership working, with relevant organisations in the public, private and voluntary sector, was recommended as something that may help enhance data quality, accessibility and sharing.

The following conclusions were made:

- The wider determinates of substance use, and preventative factors, are essential to understanding why and how substance use occurs and should be considered in the development of preventative interventions
- Although lower than the national rate, there is still a substantial number of individuals who engage in harmful levels of alcohol and/or drug use, who are not in contact with treatment services. The underlying drivers of unmet need should be explored (and interventions developed, as appropriate), such as e.g. cultural barriers, awareness of services available and what constitutes harmful substance use
- The rate of drug and alcohol related deaths in Leeds is comparatively high, although the proportion of deaths within treatment are either similar to, or comparatively lower than, the England figure. Opportunities for improving existing systems should be explored
- At both a national and local level, a large percentage of those referred to substance use treatment services, via criminal justice pathways, are not engaging in treatment. As such, improvements between criminal justice settings and treatment services should be explored, e.g. in reach communication into prisons
- Although the drug and alcohol service has a Cooccurring Mental Health Alcohol and Drug Team, improving links between existing drugs and alcohol services and mental health services may help further support recovery.

The findings and recommendations of the Leeds Drug and Alcohol Joint Needs Assessment were presented and discussed at the first LDAP meeting, held on 15 November 2022, and actions have been taken forward into the Leeds Drug and Alcohol Strategy and Action Plan 2025-30.

4 Leeds Drug and Alcohol Strategy and Action Plan

The Leeds Drug and Alcohol Strategy and Action Plan 2025-30 is currently being updated. It sets out the city's plans for addressing the harms caused by drug and alcohol use, informed by the findings of the Leeds Drug and Alcohol Joint Needs Assessment and the ambitions and challenges of the Government's latest drug and alcohol strategies, as well as local ambitions to deliver the Leeds Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Safer Leeds Community Safety Strategy, Best Council Plan and Leeds Health and Care Plan. It has four overarching outcome areas:

Outcome 1 – fewer people misuse drugs and /or alcohol and where people do use they make better, safer and informed choices

- Increase awareness of drug and alcohol issues
- Ensure the availability of high quality harm reduction services
- Reduce drug and alcohol related deaths.

Outcome 2 – Increase the proportion of people recovering from drug and/or alcohol misuse

- Ensure treatment services are effective, high quality and responsive to need
- Increase the capacity and competency of the workforce
- Ensure effective pathways and outreach provision is in place to support drug and alcohol users to access the support they need
- Provide a wide and varied number of options to promote and support recovery.

Outcome 3 – Reduce crime and disorder associated with drug and/or alcohol misuse

- Tackle serious and organised crime, including county lines
- Reduce offending and antisocial behaviour associated with drug and alcohol use and improve outcomes for offenders
- Reduce the availability and harm caused by illicit drugs and the inappropriate availability of alcohol.

Outcome 4 – Reduce the impact of harm from drugs and alcohol on children, young people and families

- Ensure children and young people are informed about the potential harms of drugs and alcohol
- Protect children and young people and prevent harm by supporting parents/carers into effective treatment
- Protect children and young people - including addressing the impact of drugs and alcohol on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)/Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)/domestic violence and abuse (DVA)/anti-social behaviour (ASB)/Serious Youth Violence
- Ensure children and young people are supported to access services for their drug and/or alcohol use
- Respond to digital threats and opportunities.

A wide range of services and organisations, across the city, have been consulted on the draft (which is due to be published in 2025), in addition to the LDAP, it's subgroups, and various other relevant Boards and groups.

5 Service user involvement

In 2020/21, a review of Forward Leeds was carried out by WY-FI (a Humankind-led partnership), which has experience of evaluating system and service design, particularly from a coproduced perspective that emphasises a trauma-informed approach. The Forward Leeds Review involved interviewing over 50 staff, from all of the Forward Leeds partners. In addition, the review incorporated 102 service user survey responses (which was co-produced with a volunteer from 5 Ways Recovery Academy), as well as semi-structured service user interviews. The review was designed to 'pick Forward Leeds apart', with the aim of finding out the things that were not working and areas where service users were struggling to access and how to improve these.

Since publication, the findings and recommendations have been used to inform the funding proposals that have been developed for the Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant (SSMTRG, detailed below), ensuring service user's voice, wishes and needs have been incorporated into the recent expansion of the Forward Leeds service. Forward Leeds also developed the "Art of working together" group, where frontline staff and service users can address issues and topics of relevance.

In addition, those with lived experience have been involved in the development of the Leeds Drug and Alcohol Strategy and Action Plan, through the "Art of working together" group. Focus groups were conducted, on the draft, giving those with lived experience the opportunity to give their views, particularly in relation to the approach and content.

In July 2023, Leeds declared an intention of working towards becoming an inclusive recovery city, and Forward Leeds and local lived experience recovery organisations (LEROs) have worked together to create an interactive recovery map and website of all recovery activity in Leeds including peer-led initiatives.

The LDAP continue to explore new ways of working with those with lived experience.

6 Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant (year 3: 2024-25)

Following additional funding in recent years (£881,000 Universal Grant Funding in 2021-22; £2,596,729 SSMTRG in 2022-23; and £4,255,542 SSMTRG in 2023-24), OHID confirmed the funding available for the third year of the SSMTRG (£8,212,541). The grant was used to maintain what was funded in previous years and fund the following additional provision:

Enhanced outreach and engagement provision in Forward Leeds

Three Assertive Outreach and Engagement Worker posts, plus a Team Manager post, have been created to expand harm reduction outreach. This will help tackle antisocial street drinking and provide ongoing support until individuals actively participate in structured treatment – blending street outreach and intensive one-on-one interactions, ensuring targeted support and improving overall health outcomes.

An additional three Specialist Community Alcohol Worker posts, and a Lead Practitioner post, supported by a part time administrator post, have also been created. These posts will help bolster alcohol detox support and enhance support for high-risk drinkers, prioritising

severe alcohol dependencies, older individuals, and those with complex health conditions. The team commits to timely community-based assessments within 48 hours, collaborating with community providers to ensure accessible treatment options, actively involving minority ethnic populations.

Touchstone Outreach & Prevention Service (TOPS), which supports people street drinking in Harehills, through regular outreach and drop-in sessions, including offering immediate support where possible, will also now be funded by the SSMTRG.

Increased capacity in the Forward Leeds Focused Interventions Team

An additional six Focused Intervention Recovery Coordinator posts, plus a Manager post (to support the teams expansion), have been created. They will strengthen case management for individuals undergoing structured treatment in non-opiate and alcohol cohorts and tackle caseload capacity challenges, ensuring reduced waiting times, increased capacity, and implementing a targeted approach for positive outcomes.

Increased capacity in the Forward Leeds Co-Occurring Mental Health Alcohol and Drug (COMHAD) Team

Six Case Manager posts have been created in the COMHAD Team to boost capacity to meet increasing demand, minimise waiting times and provide swift service access for individuals with severe and enduring co-occurring mental health conditions.

A Speciality Doctor and three Advanced Nurse Practitioner posts have also been created to provide specialist diagnosis and enhance clinical proficiency and prescribing capacity in this team.

Creation of a Specialised Sex Worker Team in Forward Leeds

A Specialised Sex Worker Team for enhanced engagement and support – comprising three Recovery Coordinators and a Lead Practitioner – has been created. The team will offer innovative, flexible, and trauma-informed support to sex workers, through an assertive outreach-based model. The team collaborates with existing service providers, law enforcement, and healthcare services to remove barriers to treatment and reduce substance-related harms.

Increased Active Recovery Coordinator Trainee opportunities in Forward Leeds

An additional five (9-month traineeship) Active Recovery Coordinator Trainee posts have been created. The recruits will be given comprehensive training that empowers them to assist individuals with opiate dependence, actively reducing caseloads and enhancing access to structured opiate treatment. This approach builds on a successful ('grow our own') pilot project and will help with the recruitment and retention of the workforce.

Enhanced access to treatment at Forward Leeds

An additional three Single Point of Contact Engagement Coordinator posts have been created to enhance coordination, responsiveness, and workforce skills. This includes 'Advisors' for initial contact post-referral and 'Engagement Facilitators' for initiative-taking engagement with non-responsive individuals.

Increased prescribing capacity in Forward Leeds

Four Independent Prescriber posts have been created to bolster treatment capacity, enhance workforce competency, and meet OHID targets. The posts will help improve response times, broaden access to treatment, support retention rates, and accommodate an additional 1500 service users, ensuring high-quality care.

Introduction of a Day-Habilitation Programme at Forward Leeds

Three Dayhab Coordinator posts have been created to support the new Day-Habilitation Programme, for individuals newly abstinent from community or inpatient detox. The program, combining group work and personalised sessions, emphasises structured interventions to enhance recovery capital. Through residential trips and group events it will deliver a comprehensive approach to aftercare and recovery.

Additional Specialist posts in Forward Leeds

A number of additional specialist posts have been created in Forward Leeds, including a:

- Health Inclusion Nurse to fill service gaps in the Leeds Healthcare network, focusing on individuals with multiple disadvantages
- Care Leavers Recovery Coordinator to facilitate seamless access to treatment and enhance outcomes for young adults transitioning into independent living
- Chemsex Worker to provide tailored psychosexual interventions, expand clinic capacity, and reduce engagement barriers for the Chemsex/LGBTQ+ communities
- Peer-to-Peer Development Coordinator to collaborate with the Regional Volunteer Coordinator to extend a volunteer network across Forward Leeds
- Collegiate Recovery Programme Coordinator to provide a secure space for mutual aid groups, sober activities, and treatment access
- Marketing and Communications Officer to create engaging content for diverse campaigns, optimising social media for maximum reach
- SQL Analyst to enhance reporting efficiency and data infrastructure in the service.

Further expansion of teams in Forward Leeds

A number of additional posts have also been added to existing teams in Forward Leeds, to extend support and bolster the current offer, including two Enhanced Care Workers, two Family Plus Workers, an Active Recovery Worker and a Young Peoples Group and Community Worker.

In addition, a number of manager posts (Criminal Justice, Young Peoples and Family Plus), as well as administrative and other support roles, have been created to support the expansion of teams.

Additional spend

Some of the funding will also be used for additional Buvidal (to support those within the criminal justice system and vulnerable populations), inpatient detox and rehabilitation (for individuals engaged through the Sex Worker Team), family rehabilitation, increased prescribing costs, a Community Impact Grant Program to support recovery-focused initiatives and research projects, a Recovery Personalisation Budget to support individuals in early recovery, as well as additional funding for sessional workers, marketing, and the cost of community rental space.

A total of 63.5 posts were created, using the SSMTRG, in 2024-25.

7 Local outcomes

Delivery change in this highly complex environment takes time and we are only at the start of a long-term journey. However, although it's still too early to show the impact the recent increases in funding have had, initial data show a number of positive signs, as well as highlight areas for improvement.

Since 2020/21, the number adults and young people (which includes 18-24 year olds in the Young People's Service) in community-based structured treatment has started to increase.

For adults, we are now close to supporting 6,000 people, in a 12-month period, for the first time.

The number of adults who successfully completed treatment, in 2023/24, is higher in Leeds than the national average for all four categories (opiate; alcohol only; alcohol and non-opiate; and non-opiate). The trends are in line with the national picture. It should be noted that the last two years have seen considerable upheaval across the system, as services have been expanding and reorganising. It is expected that completions will improve, again, after a period of stability.

In terms of successful completions of opiate treatment, Leeds is the best performing Core City by a considerable margin, and there has been continuous improvement throughout the lifetime of Forward Leeds (since July 2015).

In terms of adults in treatment showing substantial progress (which incorporates those who have completed treatment and do not have an acute housing need, are in treatment and have stopped using their problem substance or are in treatment and have significantly reduced their use of their problem substance over the preceding 12 months), although there has been a slight decrease, Leeds remains above the England average and in line with the national trend.

Following some years of decreasing hospital admissions (where the primary diagnosis is poisoning by controlled drugs) there has been an increase over the last year, with Leeds much closer to the England average.

Increasing the number of adults with a substance misuse treatment need who successfully engage in community-based structured treatment, following release from prison, has been a priority over the last year and a half. As a result, there has been significant improvement in this area. At the end of 2023/24, the figure had risen by 15%, compared to the year before.

The percentage of people who died during their time in contact with drug and alcohol treatment – where the reason for exiting treatment is given as ‘client died’ (which could be any cause of death) – declined in 2023/24 and is lower than the national average. This reflects the positive approach taken to harm reduction, in Leeds, such as naloxone, BBV screenings, street support teams and community outreach schemes.

The majority of adults in treatment have no reported housing problems in the last 28 days, with the percentage remaining stable between 2020/21 and 2023/24 and reflecting the national average. Since 2019/20, there has also been a decrease in the number and proportion of households owed a homelessness duty with a drug dependency need.

In terms of employment, the percentage of adults in treatment, in Leeds, that have reported at least one day of paid work has remained stable, since 2020/21. The percentage of people in voluntary work (which, from April 2022, has included structured work placements) has increased significantly, during this time, and is substantially higher than the national average. Finally, the percentage of people in training and education has also seen a large increase, whereas the national figure appears to have plateaued. The increases, in Leeds, are in part because of the successes of the Individual Placement Support Employment Team.

8 Forward Leeds service and service user feedback

This section includes feedback, given by staff, about the impact the funding has had on the work that they (and their teams) do, as well as the views of service users.

Criminal Justice Team

Since the Public Health England Universal Grant Funding (2021-22), the Criminal Justice Team (pictured below) has been expanding, supporting the recovery of individuals transitioning from the criminal justice system to community treatment services. Staff in the team work with service users to create individualised recovery plans, coordinating with criminal justice agencies (including prisons and the IOM service) and improving continuity of care.



Kathryn Blackburn (Team Manager) said:

“Our city-wide team can now provide specialist, intensive support for people who are involved in the criminal justice system.

This might be the need for a smooth transition of continued treatment from a custodial setting into the community or to collaborate with Probation on the

joint management of individuals who are court mandated to address drug/alcohol related offending”.

Specialist Sex Worker Team

The Specialised Sex Worker Team (pictured below) was created in year three (2024-25) of the OHID SSMTRG and comprises four posts. The team collaborates with existing service providers, law enforcement, and healthcare services to remove barriers to treatment and reduce substance-related harms.



Kerry McCormack (Sex Worker Lead) said:

“We are now able to provide intensive holistic support via outreach, working closely with all relevant organisations across the city.

“We can offer more flexible support for drug and alcohol use, including a continuation of the Buprenorphine pathway. We can also meet other needs such as healthcare, exploitation, DVA, housing, sexual health, mental health, and social support.

“Alongside this, there is a big focus on engagement as many of these individuals are not currently able to access treatment. To overcome these barriers we’re offering additional services, such as outreach prescribing clinics; late night outreach support for those who cannot access 9-5 hours; female-only spaces; support for male, trans and non-binary sex workers; and support for students engaging in sex work”.

Forward Leeds service users also speak highly of the service, with a number commenting on the excellent support they have received, during a recent “Art of working together” group meeting.

Service User 1 said:

“We are not defined by our past, we have choices and can decide who we want to be now and in the future, my worker helped me choose who I wanted to be”.

Service User 2 said:

“My drug worker kept me alive long enough to be ready for recovery”.

9 Office for Health Improvement and Disparities Visit

Increasing the number of people in drug treatment is a key priority in the national drug strategy, *From harm to hope*. However, since March 2022, although overall numbers of opiate users in treatment have increased, at a national level, they remain below pre-strategy baseline levels, with over two-thirds of local authorities currently at, or below, baseline.

In response, OHID undertook deep dives in 30 local authorities to better understand the continuing challenges in attracting and retaining opiate users in treatment, as well as learn from areas with positive progress.

As Leeds is an area that has done particularly well in attracting opiate users into treatment, the city was selected as one of the 30 areas.

On 17 June 2024, Andy Maddison (Yorkshire & Humber Programme Manager, Substance Misuse, at OHID) and Jo Anne Welsh (Programme Manager, Drug and Alcohol Improvement Support Team, at OHID), visited Leeds to conduct the deep dive. They met with Council officers, staff at Forward Leeds and those with lived and living experience of accessing and navigating the Leeds treatment system.

Following the visit, OHID commended Leeds for its outstanding leadership and collaboration, coupled with a quality drug treatment system and ambition to be world-class. They stated:

“The leadership and collaborative efforts of Leeds City Council, the commissioning team, and public health teams have significantly bolstered the drug treatment system. Your comprehensive, inclusive, and innovative approach sets a benchmark for other regions. We at OHID are proud to support and recognise your outstanding work”.

They also acknowledged the strength of the city’s partnership working, going on to say:

“The strength and active participation in the Combatting Drugs Partnership has notably enhanced engagement and driven increased collaboration, particularly within the Criminal Justice System. This concerted effort has fostered a more integrated approach, significantly improving the coordination and effectiveness of services aimed at addressing substance misuse and related issues”.

In relation to Forward Leeds, they recognised that the service is rated outstanding by the Care Quality Commission, and were of the view that it is highly inclusive, with a strong, widely recognised brand identity, known by the public and professional alike. How the service has managed caseload sizes effectively, while ensuring interventions are high quality, was also commended. Further positive comments were made in relation to the diverse and specialised services on offer (such as Buvidal access for sex workers, chemsex specialists, and targeted support for the Gypsy/traveller community), as well as the extensive outreach efforts, including those for rough sleepers, with a visible active Recovery Academy

underscoring the comprehensive offer in the city. Other aspects that were highlighted included the system's trauma-informed approach and the integration of mental health expertise.

Leeds was also seen as being somewhere that has successfully attracted and retained a skilled workforce, with proactive recruitment and retention strategies. In addition, OHID recognised the strong focus on staff development, visible career progression, and innovative recruitment initiatives, which has led to a stable system where the majority of newly funded posts had already been recruited to.

Other aspects of the system that were considered excellent included the engagement of individuals with lived experience in monitoring and improving the treatment and recovery offer, as well as the Leeds Drug Alert System.

However, the need to continue to tackle broader unmet needs within the community, including providing support for those who have not yet accessed services, was also noted.

10 Dame Carol Black visit

Following the OHID visit, the Government's independent advisor on drugs, Dame Carol Black, came to Leeds, on 9 September 2024, to see all the impressive work being done across the city. This included a visit to Forward Leeds. Dame Carol was joined by Bola Akinwale (Deputy Director, Drugs Misuse Data & Improvement Support, at OHID) and Kate Stockdale (Programme Manager, Drug & Alcohol Improvement Support Team, at OHID).

They started their day with a meeting with senior officials from Leeds City Council, including Tom Riordan (Chief Executive), Victoria Eaton (Director of Public Health) and Councillor Fiona Venner (Executive Member for Equality, Health and Wellbeing). This session set the scene in Leeds and included an outline of the broader Public Health links to inequalities work in the city together with drug and alcohol partnership working.

Following this, they met with senior members of staff from Forward Leeds, at the service's city centre hub. This session provided them with an opportunity to understand and explore the work being done, by the service, to meet the objectives of the national drug strategy, *From harm to hope*. This included an overview of the service's expansion plan, recruitment and retention strategy, ambition to become worldclass, the challenges the service faces and its responses to these.

Following the visit, Dame Carol said she felt that Leeds absolutely understood the opportunities that her report, and the subsequent funding, presented. She added that Leeds is an impressive example of how to use new money to create whole systems reform.

11 Conclusion

Considerable progress has been made, over the last year, responding to the wishes and needs of those who use drugs and alcohol in Leeds, including sustainable investment in services, as well as growing the city's recovery community.

Like all local authorities, Leeds faces challenges, from attracting and retaining the drug and alcohol workforce, to responding to new emerging issues e.g. synthetic opioids. However, having effectively utilised the significant new funding brought into the city, alongside the well-established LDAP, Leeds is in a great position to build on the great success it has had.