

# Areas of Research Interest

2025-26

## Purpose

The **Leeds City Council Areas of Research Interest (ARI)** are questions and topics on which the Council invites expert advice, evidence, data and research. The purpose of the ARIs is to communicate Leeds City Council's strategic research needs to support evidence-informed policymaking.

The Council's mission is to reduce poverty and inequality. Our shared goal is that Leeds reaches its full potential, for everyone living, working, studying or visiting here. Our recently launched **Leeds Ambitions** are the four priorities we've chosen to achieve our mission of reducing poverty and inequality. The ambitions sharpen our focus on the things that will make the biggest difference to improving people's lives in Leeds over the next decade. We want to be evidence-informed in our strategy too, so we are collaborating with Leeds Beckett University and the University of Leeds to develop an evaluation framework for delivering the Leeds Ambitions themselves, ensuring we are on track to achieve our ambitions. If you are interested in this aspect of our research collaboration, please get in touch at [policy@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:policy@leeds.gov.uk)

The Areas of Research Interest have been grouped under each of the four priority areas of:

### **Health and Wellbeing**

### **Inclusive Growth**

### **Strong Communities**

### **Sustainable City**

The Leeds City Council ARI are published annually with additional research needs and questions updated as they arise. The Council's approach to using ARI is growing and will continue to evolve.

We anticipate that many local authorities across the UK will be grappling with similar issues, so there is potential to have considerable impact by engaging with these questions. Leeds City Council is connected to wider conversations about academic-policy engagement through work with all five of the city's universities, the Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network (YPERN) and the Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN). A [case study](#) about our work has been published by UPEN.

## Context

Our city itself is continuing to change – often in ways which add to the richness and diversity of our culture and communities, but at times also in a way which highlights the big challenges we continue to face, particularly around the impact of poverty and inequality.

- our population continues to rise – increasing by 9% over the last decade and projected to keep growing at a rate of 3% to 2035
- like everywhere in the UK, we have an ageing population, with the number of people aged 80-84 expected to increase by 27% by 2030

- we also see growth in our younger population too, with a more than 6% rise in the number of 15–19-year-olds by 2030
- we see demand for services across the public and third sectors continuing to increase – with challenges on both volume and complexity in cases causing pressure on the front line and challenging financial sustainability of the system
- population growth is fastest in our low-income communities where people are more likely to experience poverty – at a time when we already have a quarter of adults and a third of children living in neighbourhoods amongst the 10% most deprived nationally
- poverty and inequality in Leeds is stubborn and entrenched, with around 20-22% people living in relative poverty each year for more than a decade, despite all the good work ongoing in the city
- the Leeds economy remains strong and resilient, with business confidence in the service sector on the rise, but national and global factors mean this remains a volatile picture
- as with other Core Cities, productivity levels in our economy remain stubbornly low and lag behind London and the South East. Closing this gap would mean £3bn extra added to the UK economy each year

Responding in the right way to these challenges is a big part of how we will take forward our Ambitions for Leeds. That task will not be easy, but we also have reasons to be optimistic.

## **Our Team Leeds approach**

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 in the city and across West Yorkshire, being ambitious about our collective social, economic and environmental impact, and using our buildings, assets, relationships and other resources more collectively and creatively to deliver on shared goals.

When it comes to evidence-informed policy, the Council is keen to collaborate with other Team Leeds institutions: universities, civic institutions, and community partners.

## **What are Areas of Research Interest?**

Areas of Research Interest (ARIs) are designed to inform policies and help shape evidence-informed decision making. Areas of Research Interests are statements of topics or questions published by organisations that are looking to collaborate with others to fill evidence gaps or to carry out research to inform their policies. They have been published by a range of policy bodies, including UK Government Departments, Parliamentary Committees, Combined Authorities, and Local Councils, to raise awareness of their research priorities and engage with the research community. ARIs are not an invitation to tender.

## **Relevance**

Leeds ARIs stimulate collaboration with researchers, civic institutions, and community partners. While focused on the city, the Leeds ARI often have wider regional, national, and global relevance.

We have described our broad areas of interest, and have also included some specific questions, but we encourage you to bring your own knowledge, expertise and experience to these areas in order to help us think through solutions for creating a city for the future.

## 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 2025-26. 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 a broader introductory discussion, or for help navigating the council, you can contact [policy@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:policy@leeds.gov.uk)

## Health and Wellbeing

Leeds will be a healthy and caring city for everyone: where together we create the conditions for healthier lives so people who are the poorest improve their health the fastest, and everyone is supported to thrive from early years to later life.

### 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.
- How we can maximise our impact on people and communities living in IMD decile 1?

### 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?
- What are the key causes of the gap in child development in the city, and what are the opportunities/priorities to improve child development and reduce inequalities? In the context of financial challenges, what are effective approaches for implementation? I.e. evidence on priority spend?

### 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?
- What are the opportunities and priorities to improve the quality, affordability and security of housing in the Private Rented Sector?

- Evaluation of the city's Selective Licensing approach to private rented sector housing to improve housing quality and outcomes including health and wellbeing, education etc.?
- What are the causes of the rising levels of homelessness in Leeds? How can we intervene to prevent and mitigate homelessness?

### **Neighbourhood health and 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
- How can neighbourhood health approaches improve access to health care and support (including primary care, mental health support, healthy living and social prescribing, drug and alcohol and other services) particularly in IMD Decile 1?
- How can neighbourhood health improve health and wellbeing outcomes, including public health outcomes, management of long term conditions, particularly in IMD Decile 1?
- How can neighbourhood approaches integrate support on the wider determinants of health and built partnerships between statutory, third sector and other partners?
- How can citizen voice and community power be maximised in neighbourhood health approaches in Leeds?

### **Protecting and improving health and reducing health inequalities**

- What evidence-based interventions are most effective in improving vaccination uptake across diverse populations, and how can approaches be co-designed?
- How can we learn from local outbreak responses and modelling for future infectious disease threats in Leeds?
- What policies and interventions are most effective in reducing lead exposure risks in homes with elevated lead levels?
- 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?
- Effective, equitable and inclusive approaches to promote health and provide support (e.g. sexual health services), including digital approaches

## **Inclusive Growth**

Leeds will be a place where we reduce poverty and inequality by creating growth in our economy that works for all, where everyone gets a great education, businesses find the talent they need to start, innovate and grow, investment increases and together we deliver an inclusive, healthier and more sustainable future.

### **Inclusive economic growth and opportunity**

- What sectors, local assets or growth pathways offer the greatest potential to deliver jobs and prosperity in underserved communities?
- How can growth strategies ensure that rising prosperity is widely shared and does not exacerbate local inequalities?

- What are the barriers preventing certain demographic groups from accessing good work, enterprise or economic mobility in Leeds, and how can these be overcome?
- How can anchor institutions (e.g., the council, universities, major employers) use procurement, employment practices and investment to support inclusive economic outcomes?

### **Business and regeneration**

- What factors most affect a local centres' 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?

### **Welfare support offer and financial resilience**

- How can we map and understand the welfare offer across the city in its broadest sense? 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?
- 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.

## **Strong Communities**

Leeds will be a welcoming, safe and clean city where people have the power to make the changes that are important to them, with cohesive and united neighbourhoods where people are living healthier lives and enjoying the city's vibrant social, cultural and sporting offer.

**ARI for the Thriving: Strong Communities Ambition are currently in development, working with Leeds ACTS and Leeds Community Anchors Network.**

## **Sustainable City**

Leeds will be the UK's first net zero and nature positive city, rapidly reducing carbon emissions and restoring nature, supporting people and businesses to make increasingly sustainable choices that improve their standard of living and create a regenerative thriving city.

### **Climate resilience and adaptation**

Exploring how Leeds can better prepare for, withstand, and recover from the impacts of a changing climate.

- How can we build neighbourhood-level resilience to extreme weather such as heatwaves, flooding, and drought?
- What data and tools can help assess climate vulnerabilities and monitor adaptation progress?
- What community-led models most effectively support preparedness and recovery after climate shocks?

### **Sustainability and resource flows**

Understanding how Leeds can reduce waste and make better use of materials, supporting local innovation and sustainability.

- How can we map the flow of materials and waste across Leeds to identify opportunities for reuse, repair, and recycling?
- What local business models, incentives, or community initiatives are most effective in supporting circular practices?
- How can behaviour change and awareness campaigns increase participation in sharing, repairing, and reusing schemes?
- How can procurement and public services be redesigned to embed circular principles?

### **Net zero transitions and sustainable energy**

Investigating how Leeds can decarbonise fairly and effectively while ensuring inclusive participation and benefits for all communities.

- What local levers and interventions have the greatest impact on achieving Net Zero goals?
- How do different communities experience the costs, benefits, and trade-offs of decarbonisation?
- How can carbon literacy be embedded across schools, businesses, and council services?
- What are the most effective approaches to influencing sustainable household choices, such as home retrofits, energy use, and travel behaviour?

### **Financing and partnership innovation**

Building new models of collaboration and investment to drive local sustainability and resilience.

- What financing models (e.g. community bonds, blended finance, green investment funds) can unlock sustainable development at a city level?
- What governance and monitoring frameworks ensure transparent, accountable climate investment?

## **Working With Us**

Leeds City Council invites collaboration with universities, research centres, community organisations, and industry. Engagement is welcomed through:

- Sharing evidence or research findings
- Developing or co-producing joint projects
- Aligning grant applications to Leeds ARIs

If you have new evidence that completely or partly answers one of our questions, or relates to LCC's areas of work more broadly, we invite you to share that.

If you are, or plan to be, carrying our research relating to one of our questions, we would like to hear about it.

If you are submitting a funding or grant application that aligns with one of our questions, we hope that referencing LCC's ARIs will help strengthen your case for the possible public impact of the research.

We may also be able to offer endorsement of funding or grant applications depending on resources available at the time. The ARIs should be seen as an offer to collaborate with researchers on projects and we will respond to speculative approaches for research funding where possible and appropriate. Leeds City Council's ARIs are not an invitation to tender but an open offer to collaborate in shaping the city's future through evidence-based research.

Leeds City Council is committed to place-based policies and planning. We are, therefore, open in principle to providing access to data that we hold with the aim of understanding our city and region better.

For any general queries please get in touch at [policy@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:policy@leeds.gov.uk)