

# Making Leeds the Best City to Grow Old in

The Power of  
Partnership



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## Section 1

# Introduction and background

### The strategic partnership

In December 2017, the Centre for Ageing Better (Ageing Better), Leeds City Council (LCC), and Leeds Older People's Forum (LOPF) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establish a five-year, strategic partnership centred around testing and applying 'what works' to make Leeds a better place to live and age for anyone aged 50 and over. The outcomes could then be disseminated as evidence to support similar initiatives elsewhere in the UK and worldwide.

At its outset the partnership aimed to address the key issues of housing, transport and communities, although as the years progressed and the relationship between the partners matured, new areas of focus emerged.

This report presents a summary of the partnership's successes and the learning along the way. Throughout, we have provided pointers to key further reading for those seeking more detail on specific areas.

### Why it worked: a firm foundation

The partnership incorporated several key features which proved critical to its success:

- **the formal nature of the arrangement** meant mechanisms of governance, including senior and political support, were in place from the start, helping to keep the partnership on track
- **the appointment of a partnership manager**, employed by Ageing Better and hosted by LCC, provided cohesion and continuity

- **the length of the partnership:** while still relatively short in real terms, five years is longer than many collaborations of this type, and represented a significant, stable period of commitment



Partners

**The Centre for Ageing Better** is a national charitable foundation pioneering ways to make ageing a better reality for everyone.

**Leeds City Council (LCC)** has a strong commitment to an age-friendly agenda, as reflected in its ‘Age Friendly Leeds’ and ‘Health and Wellbeing’ strategies.

**Leeds Older People’s Forum** is a network of third sector organisations and a registered charity working with and for older people in Leeds, a partner of Age Friendly Leeds.

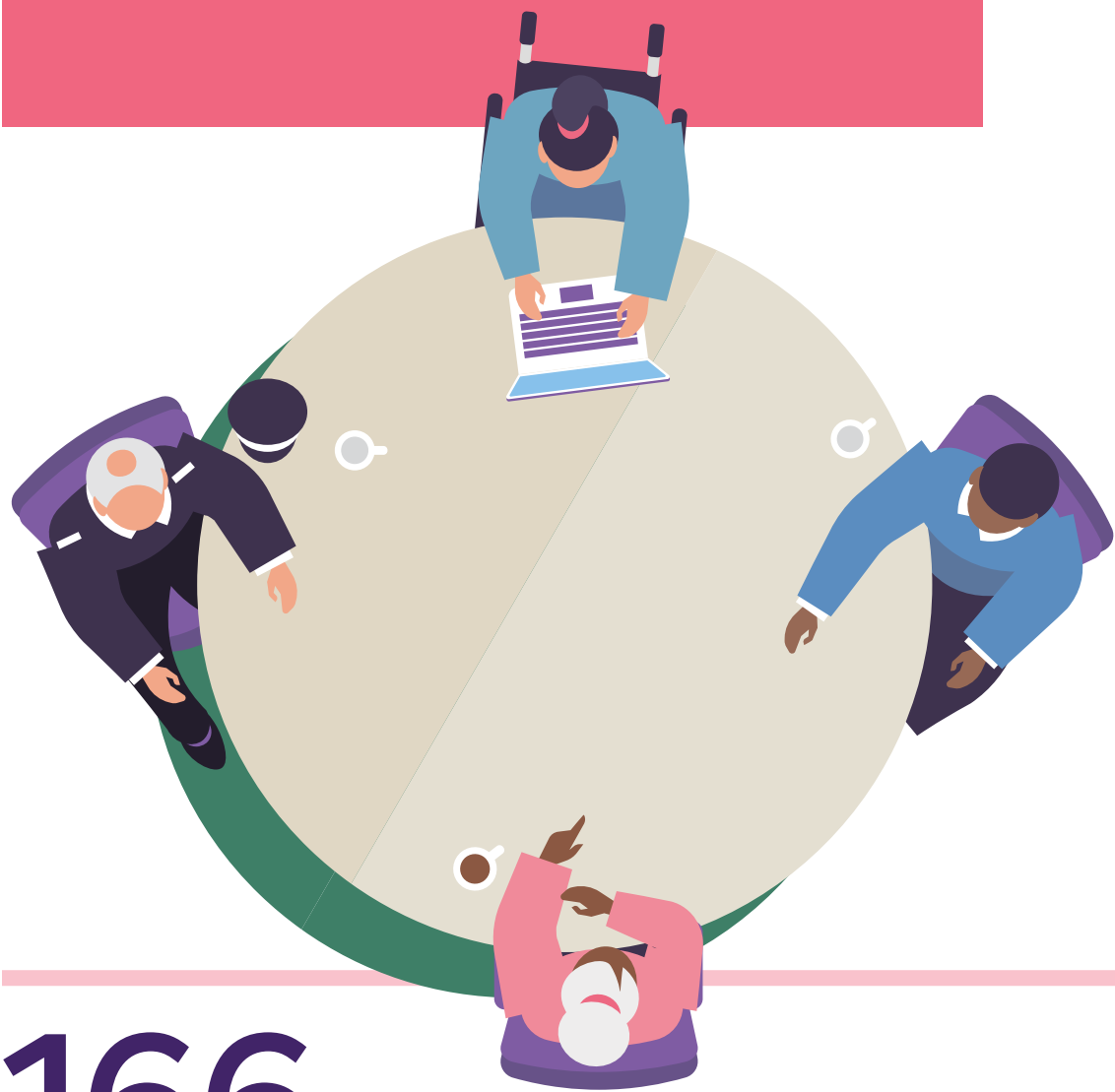
Key Stakeholders

- | Adults & Health, LCC
- | Age Friendly Leeds
- | Age Proud Leeds Partnership
- | Better Homes Yorkshire
- | Care and Repair (England and Leeds)
- | Climate, Energy and Green Spaces, LCC
- | Community Relations and Cohesion, LCC
- | Culture, LCC
- | Employment & Skills, LCC
- | Forum Central
- | Frailty Population Board
- | Hamara
- | Health for All Leeds
- | Highways & Transportation, LCC
- | Housing, LCC
- | Human Resources, LCC
- | Libraries, LCC
- | Leeds Health and Care Partnership
- | Leeds Neighbourhood Networks
- | Me and My Home Group
- | Public Health, LCC
- | Sheffield Hallam University
- | South Ministry Network
- | Touchstone Sikh Elders
- | UK Network of Age Friendly Communities
- | West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- | West Yorkshire Health & Care Partnership
- | Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), Yorkshire & Humber region

Why Leeds?

Leeds has long been committed to the wellbeing and resilience of its diverse communities, promoting independence for older people, enabling them to live and thrive in their own communities for as long as possible. The city’s vision – to be ‘the best city in the UK ... a healthy and caring city for all ages’ – made it an ideal place for this strategic partnership to refine and share learning from existing initiatives and introduce new joint research and inspire practical action.

# The partnership in numbers



**166**  
actions in Leeds Age Friendly Action Plan



**37**  
Neighbourhood Networks evaluated



**58**  
older tenants and homeowners in Leeds engaged in research to improve housing information and advice



**7**  
community researchers trained



**114**  
business and organisations signed up to LOPF's Age and Dementia Friendly business scheme, from GP Surgeries to a local Santander Bank



**44**  
residents took part in focus groups to inform 'The State of Ageing in Leeds'



**267**  
(and rising) Age friendly Ambassadors advocating for age friendly practices in their day to day lives

# Ageing in Leeds

The UK population is undergoing a massive age shift, and Leeds is no exception. Recognising local demographic trends and projections is a vital first step to creating meaningful action.

The partnership therefore developed The State of Ageing in Leeds (2021), a comprehensive and important report that continues to have impact, including through shaping the city’s age-friendly strategy and action plan.

1 in 3

people living in Leeds is aged 50 and over



65+

people aged 65 and over have higher levels of satisfaction with their home and neighbourhood than residents in other age groups, with over one in four saying that they want to remain living in their own home as they age



80%

80% of Leeds residents aged 65 and over have claimed their concessionary bus pass, this drops to 60% in more deprived areas



+50%

the number of Leeds residents aged 80 and over will increase by 50% over the next 20 years



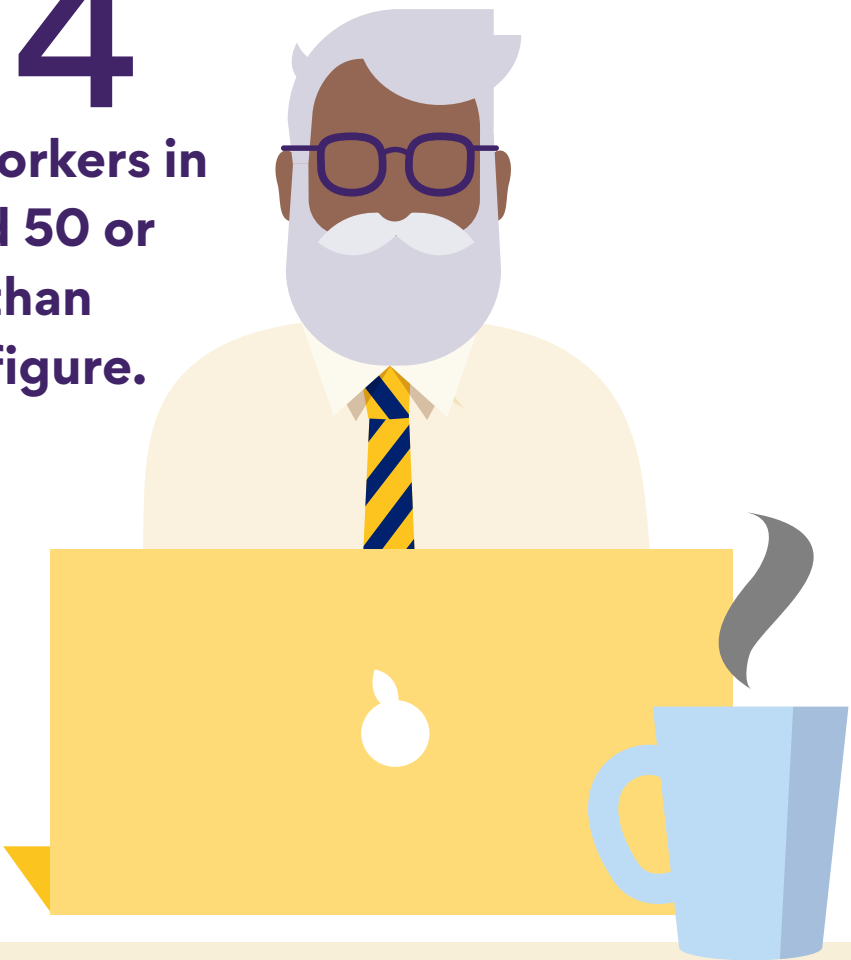
24%

of residents of all ages are living in the top deprivation decile; this has increased over the past decade as an increasing proportion of Leeds neighbourhoods have fallen into the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods in the country



1 in 4

one in four workers in Leeds is aged 50 or over, higher than the national figure.



## Section 2

# The partnership in action

An essential ingredient in the partnership was learning from each other, and together, about what works and what does not and turning this learning into practical action.

Leeds was already a leader in age-friendly policy and practice and Ageing Better a national organisation working to ensure more people can enjoy a good later life. All parties were able to make an equal contribution and take useful lessons from one another's experiences and learning, to shape local and national policy and practice.

Practically speaking, the process was often to start with a shared understanding of a specific challenge, informed by the views of older people,

then undertake research to better understand the problem, and develop solutions that could be enacted locally or nationally.

This evidence promoted action that in turn had the potential to not just benefit older people in Leeds, but across the country and worldwide.

Pages 8-11 explore three areas where the partnership had impact over its lifetime.



## Age-friendly homes

Leeds now has a Housing Strategy which includes targets around age-friendly housing, and Ageing Better's policy position on housing has been informed and enhanced as a result of the partnership's work in Leeds. LOPF and LCC consulted with older people in Leeds on which housing issues were important to them, identifying a need for:

- | support to be able to live independently in their own home (e.g. with repairs, improvements and adaptations)
- | more information and face-to-face support with suitable options should people need to move (e.g. assisted housing, co-housing etc.)

**Ageing Better's policy position on housing has been informed and enhanced as a result of the partnership's work in Leeds**

- | more information on new-build housing designed to meet the needs of older people, and having an input into what those needs are

In 2019, Ageing Better worked with the 'Me and My Home' group to commission Leeds-based research and mapping on the availability and accessibility of housing information and advice.

The 'Me and My Home' group comprises partners across the city interested in keeping these issues on the agenda.

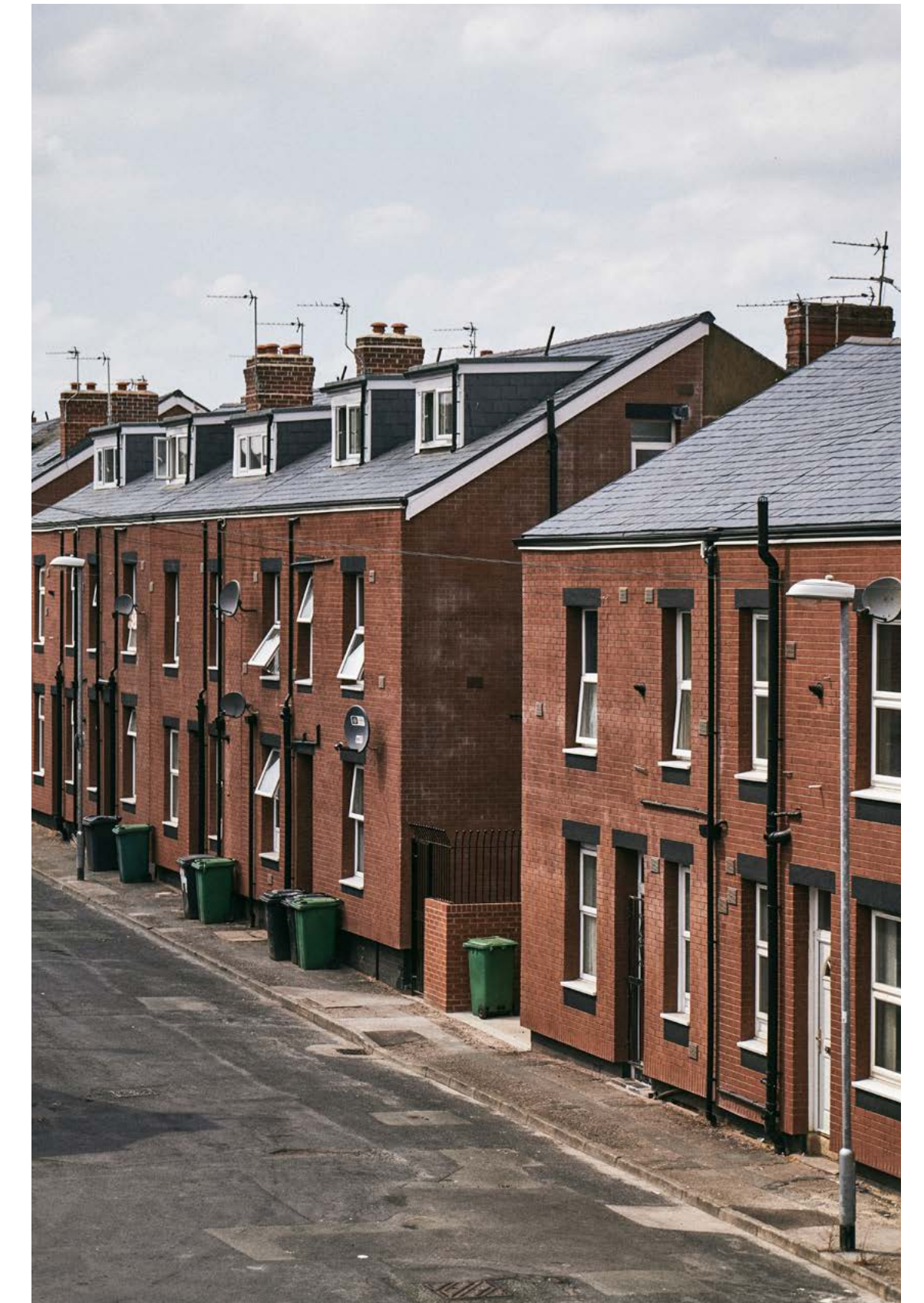
The resulting 'Home Truths' report made recommendations to local authorities and national government and continues to inform broader work on housing and health in the city, including campaigns around rightsizing led by West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership and West Yorkshire Combined Authority

The Leeds Core Strategy introduced and

followed through on accessibility standards for new-build properties as well as developing new key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure success. Since 1 January 2022, LCC has required 4,909 homes to be built to accessible standards M4(2) and 246 to M4(3) accessible standards

Working in Leeds also revealed to Ageing Better the challenges to setting local accessibility targets for developers. This was a major driver for Ageing Better in setting up the Housing Made for Everyone (HoME) Coalition, which played a pivotal role in encouraging government to launch a consultation on accessibility standards, as well as generating a mass, hard to ignore, response to the consultation.

In July 2022, the Government confirmed that it would raise the minimum accessibility standard for all new homes built in England.



### RESEARCH REVEALED ...

A lack of adapted housing for older people and adequate signposting for those seeking suitable accommodation



## Community transport

### RESEARCH REVEALED ...

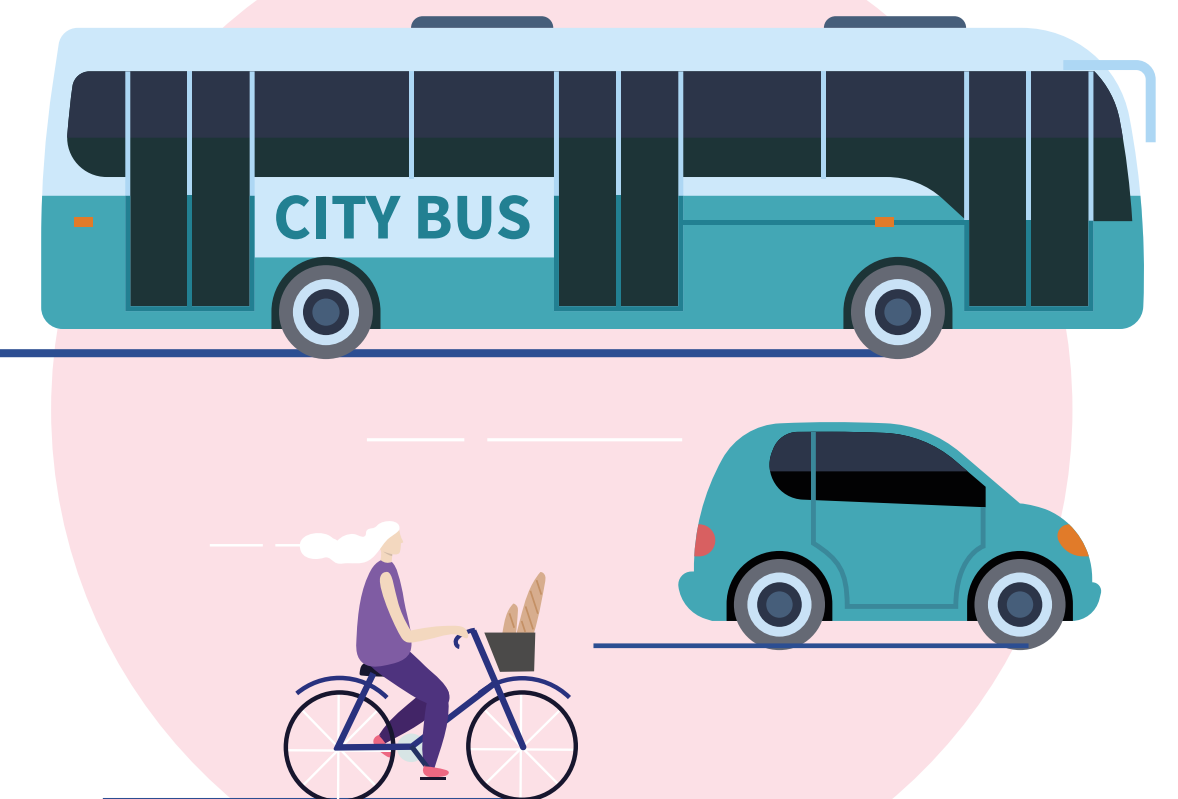
A lack of transport options to enable older people to visit friends and family, participate in social events and attend medical appointments

Many older people find travel between communities and to health appointments very difficult in Leeds, and elsewhere. Ageing Better funded research into solutions, and with the Leeds Passenger Transport Improvement Programme designed a door-to-door transport solution for people in later life and with mobility issues, using existing resources in the community and public transport sectors.

Significant commitment and progress were made with £1.3 million earmarked for development, and learning was shared with the Department for Transport (DfT) and others nationally. The final project implementation was thwarted due to the pandemic, but not

before an evidence-base was generated, contributing to a successful bid from LOPF for £447,500 to fund future community transport projects all of which will improve options for local residents, through overcoming digital barriers to booking transport or for extra support on journeys.

The need for suitable and affordable transport options in later life was also highlighted and examined as part of the Leeds Neighbourhood Network (NN) evaluation.



## Neighbourhoods and Community

In 2018 Ageing Better conducted research in Leeds and elsewhere into the informal volunteering or ‘community contributions’ of older people, informing a review, Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering, recommendations from which now form part of guidelines issued by the **National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)**.

While Leeds already had high levels of neighbourliness and associated informal support networks, **the research** showed that barriers to community life for older people remained, including health, language, transport, lack of neutral spaces and in some minority groups a sense of unease or mistrust about the wider community. On the back of this research, LCC invested in an asset-based community development worker in the area it was carried out.



### RESEARCH REVEALED ...

A rich picture of community contributions, with 90% of interviewees talking about the ways they gave or received support in their community – but barriers remained

RESEARCH REVEALED ...  
The success of the city’s unique  
Neighbourhoods Networks model

The role of the volunteer is also key to the Neighbourhood Network model, which was pioneered in Leeds and is examined in detail in the Ageing Better funded evaluation of the approach *Neighbourhood networks: A model for community-based support*. The evaluation highlights the strengths of the NN model and its application in Leeds, with a view to its adoption countrywide. NNs continue to be a success in Leeds, because the NN model:

- has been a longstanding feature of the voluntary sector in Leeds, with the first scheme launching in 1985, and continue to receive core funding

The NN model leads to concrete improvements in older people’s wellbeing

- is flexible and widely applicable in any community context
- ensures the voices of people in later life are at the heart of decision making
- is effective in both primary and secondary prevention
- offers community-based support and leads to concrete improvements in older people’s wellbeing
- promotes equity of access



Age-friendly employment

Building on an existing commitment to improve the recruitment and retention of its 50+ workforce, over the past few years the council has taken significant strides to become an age-friendly employer and model this practice to other employers in Leeds. This includes testing Ageing Better’s Good Recruitment for Older Workers

(GROW) project with focus groups of older people and employers; working with its older workers staff network to improve health and wellbeing support; promoting flexible working; and gathering and analysing data on older workers to understand how to support returning to work, career changes, upskilling and learning.

## Section 3

# Feedback and learning

### The reflective interviews

In May 2023, Ageing Better conducted a series of structured interviews with current and former staff involved in the lifetime of the partnership. The aim was to understand what was achieved, what was enabled, and any challenges to success then and now.

The interviews have helped shape this report; the following pages include a selection of direct quotes

Many people spoke of the positive role of the partnership manager, and that while one challenge was staff turnover, they spoke of the many relationships and collaborative structures maintained with momentum still building in key areas.

Several interviewees reflected on the reciprocal benefits of the partnership model; while Ageing Better brought funding, expertise and a national platform to Leeds, the learning enabled the organisation to gain a deeper understanding of local government's policy environment.

Finally, the second half of the partnership coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. That the partnership continued to make progress through this time was considered testament to its agility and strength.



# Strengths and enablers

[The partnership] opened up opportunities in terms of taking forward an agenda about older workers in employment.'

**Alex Watson, Employment and Workforce Lead, LCC**

'People get a lot out of working with, for, and together with older people, they get a huge amount of personal satisfaction from their roles in care and support ... it's not on the front pages ... so when people come together on an issue it really raises the prominence.'

**Lucy Jackson, former Chief Officer Adults and Health and Consultant in Public Health (Older people, LTC and Cancer), LCC**

'This was a really good way of us getting that projection and status and influence for the good work that we were doing. That reflects well on the city but also, hopefully, would help policy change at a national level.'

**Tom Riordan, Chief Executive, LCC**

'It felt quite groundbreaking for me because the last time the Council completed a local plan review the older person's voice was forgotten. With the centre's involvement and the work of the 'Me and My Home' group the older person's voice has felt so much stronger during more recent strategic planning reviews.'

**Mandy Sawyer, former Head of Service (Housing Need), LCC**

'We were listened to more when we were part of the tripartite agreement.'

**Bill Rollinson, LOPF trustee**

'It helped us to understand what some of the local opportunities and issues were in trying to implement the ideas and evidence that we were generating nationally.'

**Anna Dixon, former Chief Executive, Centre for Ageing Better**

'[Without partnerships], we risked developing our positions completely divorced from the real world. Learning about the challenges Leeds was facing in meeting its ambitions to build more accessible homes turned us ... to thinking okay, there needs to be national policy change in this area.'

**Natalie Turner, Deputy Director for Localities, Centre for Ageing Better**

'When everybody worked strongly together on a joint mission it was elevated, it gave everybody a really strong sense of purpose about how to really make a difference.'

**Rebecca Charlwood, former councillor responsible for adult social care and public health; former chair of health and well-being board**



‘[Leeds] wouldn’t probably have seized opportunities so readily, I think, without the stimulus of an extended partnership.’

**Alex Watson, Employment and Workforce Lead, LCC**

‘We gave a lot to the Centre for Ageing Better ... in terms of being able to give them concrete examples of things happening ... like the neighbourhood network evaluation.’

**Lucy Jackson, former Chief Officer Adults and Health and Consultant in Public Health (Older people, LTC and Cancer), LCC**

‘Having a common purpose, clear goals, being able to work at a local and national level ... helped us work together during that time ... it [created] that national–local flow [...] and helped us get further than we may have done on our own.’

**Jo Volpe, Chief Executive, LOPF**



## Challenges

‘Winning over the NHS nationally and getting the penny to drop about early intervention ... we have a conversation with everybody ... we try and take an asset-based approach to helping them. I think those things would be massively powerful if we could hardwire them into the NHS and national policy thinking.’

**Tom Riordan, Chief Executive, LCC**

‘[Because of cuts] We’ve lost 2.6 billion pounds and over 2,000 staff, so we’re having to do the same amount of work with fewer staff. 61% of the budget goes on adults’ services and children’s services. So in that context, to have projects that promote the needs of older people, and recognize that, it’s really important.’

**Councillor David Jenkins**

‘The lives of older people have probably become more difficult, not easier, in the last few years because of the combination of the pandemic [and] the cost-of-living crisis. So I think the partnership’s done some really fantastic work in spite of a really difficult context, but that actually overall, older people’s lives are probably not better than they were’

**Councillor Fiona Venner**

‘It’s not a hard sell to convince people about the health of children and young people being important. What I think might not happen, unless you have a very strong, collective position on it, is that same level and enthusiasm of support for the older population [...] I feel if we take our foot off the pedal, it wouldn’t necessarily be at the top of people’s lists who don’t work in this area.’

**Victoria Eaton, Director of Public Health, LCC**

## Section 4

# The future

In terms of social change, five years is not very long, and so the achievements of the partnership, both in practical terms and in terms of changing mindsets and maintaining focus can be regarded as significant. As such a comprehensive agenda cannot be addressed in a short period of time, continued efforts are needed locally and nationally. This future facing vision is already reflected in the policy document, *Age Friendly Leeds: Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2025* overseen by the Age Friendly Board.

Age-friendly also continues to be a priority within the city's strategies, including the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Leeds also acts as a really good example to other places of what can be achieved through partnership working and a clear vision.

### Best practice in Leeds

All the parties continue to work together in a spirit of cordiality and collaboration to further and improve upon the initiatives already in place. At the time of this report's publication, among other things we can point to:

- | Ongoing strategies to combat ageism, such as the Friendly Communities Programme which includes Age Friendly Ambassadors, businesses and organisations; and LOPF's Equalities Hub for Older People
- | Continued promotion of the consideration of all ages in 'active travel' in conjunction with the Active Travel Board



- | The Neighbourhood Network evaluation report is a live document which is continuing to influence the development of the Networks in Leeds
- | The State of Ageing in Leeds report provided a set of KPIs for the Age Friendly Leeds Strategy and Action Plan as well as informing other key strategies such as the Leeds 'Best City Ambition'
- | The Me and My Home group continues to flourish and build on the joint 'Home Truths' report and is informing broader work on housing and health in the city

- | LCC has signed Ageing Better's Age-friendly Employer Pledge, part of its continued large-scale efforts to continue to improve its own practice and that of employers across Leeds
- | There are strong partnerships between all the key stakeholders in Leeds, reflecting an ongoing commitment to the city being an age-friendly place to live

## Best practice in the UK

Policies, projects and partnerships in Age Friendly Leeds are consistently pointed to as examples of good practice for more than 60 other places in the UK through the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities to learn from, including:

| **Shared Tables project:** this project, which enabled older people living alone to share a meal together at a restaurant, was used as a case study and published nationally

| **The State of Ageing in Leeds:** this was turned into a **guide** which

is now supporting members across the network to better access and make sense of their data, with 12 members looking to create similar reports

| **Age Proud Leeds Campaign:** was shared as a way to tackle ageism

locally, in particular the Wise up to Ageism training

| **Strength and Balance**

Leeds established an effective service model for preventing falls, including Active Leeds' offer of sessions to improve strength, balance, and coordination of people with low mobility. Ageing Better became aware of and showcased this work nationally, in turn supporting recurrent funding in Leeds for the Falls Prevention Pathway



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Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.  
**Let's make ageing better.**