

LEEDS BUSINESS ANCHORS PLAYBOOK

NOVEMBER 2024



How can businesses come together to create fairer, more prosperous and healthier places where they operate?

This playbook shares learning and progress from Leeds Business Anchors, established in 2023 to bring together some of the city's large private sector organisations to increase their collective contribution to Leeds.

The development of this Playbook has been supported by funding from the Health Foundation's [Economies for Healthier Lives](#) programme which explores the role of Anchor organisations in addressing health and economic inequalities and seeks to share learning from Leeds with other places.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH




WHAT IS AN ANCHOR ORGANISATION?

Local authorities, hospitals and universities are classic examples of Anchors. They employ many people, spend substantial sums of money, have land and assets and large environmental footprints, and deliver crucial public services. They have long histories in their places and are unlikely to move. The decisions they take on these areas can have a big impact on their local communities, economy and environment.

In 2018 Leeds Anchor Network was established to bring together some of the city's largest organisations across local government, health, education, utilities and culture. Read more about this in the Leeds Anchor Playbook.

However, businesses can also act as Anchors where they have an embedded relationship with the places they operate and use their influence to bring about positive local outcomes. The Business Anchors Progression Framework provides a framework for businesses to understand how they can contribute to the place where they operate.



“Large organisations that are rooted in a place and have a significant interest and stake in the development of their local area.”

Centre for Local Economic Strategies

THE BUSINESS ANCHOR PROGRESSION FRAMEWORK: A FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL ANCHOR ACTION

All members of the network use the [Business Anchors Progression Framework](#) to self-assess their local impact, and identify areas for action. The framework has four components:

Employment: policies on recruitment, pay and conditions, progression, and health and wellbeing can support equality, diversity and inclusion and support lower paid workers, as well as helping businesses to recruit and retain staff and fully realise the talents of their workforce.

Procurement: how goods and services are bought can create opportunities for other local businesses, re-circulate wealth and bring community benefits, while still getting the right price and quality, and often improving relationships with suppliers.

Buildings, assets and the environment: enhancing local places, protecting the planet and local environment and supporting local communities through the ways that buildings, land, processes and assets are designed, procured and managed, and by adopting environmental best practice.

Corporate and community behaviours: businesses can embed anchor thinking into their strategies and practices, develop relationships with local schools and communities, and work with others to share good practice and increase impact.

The framework is a self-assessment, not an audit, and is intended to be a tool for honest reflection on progress. Many businesses say that it has helped them to identify gaps and different ways of delivering social impact.

Completing the framework gives businesses the opportunity to set ambitions, monitor their progress over time (as the framework is intended to be revisited every 1-2 years), and benchmark against other anchors (high-level headlines and average scores across members are shared with the network, but each business' submission is treated confidentially).

MEMBERS

There are ten members of Leeds Business Anchors Network. These are larger businesses with a base in Leeds who have completed the Business Anchors Progression Framework to self-assess their contribution towards the city and identify areas for action.

Some are Leeds-born businesses with their headquarters in the city, while others are national or global firms that have a sizeable presence in Leeds, such as a large office and local workforce. All share a strong commitment to Leeds and having a positive local impact.

Jacobs

**ADDLESHAW
GODDARD**

ARUP



Leeds Building Society

Balfour Beatty

cognizant

bjss

DLA PIPER

ceg:

**MOTT
MACDONALD**



“Being part of a network of organisations committed to responsible business will allow us to work together to have greater social impact in the city.”

Wendy Carter
Responsible Business Lead
Leeds Building Society

MEMBERS IN DETAIL



Addleshaw Goddard

Legal | Global | HQ: London

One of the largest legal firms in the city, Addleshaw Goddard's roots in Leeds can be traced back to 1775 when Nicholas Smith founded a firm that went on to become Booth & Co, and later Addleshaw Booth & Co. Today, the firm has around 600 employees based in the Sovereign Square office.

Cognizant

Technology | Global | HQ: USA

A relative newcomer to the city, Cognizant arrived in Leeds in 2022 with ambitious growth plans.



Arup

Engineering | Global | HQ: London

Arup have been in Leeds for over 30 years and have more than 480 employees in the city. Following 30% growth in their Leeds presence in two years, Arup expanded into bigger premises at Wellington Place in early 2024.

DLA Piper

Legal | Global | HQ: London

DLA Piper's roots in Leeds span back over 200 years, and they currently employ more than 600 people in the city. The firm are set to move into a new flagship office at City Square House in the heart of the city centre, supporting their plans for long term investment and growth in Leeds.



Balfour Beatty

Engineering | Global | HQ: London

Located at Thorpe Park business park, Balfour Beatty have contributed to major infrastructure projects in Leeds including the train station redevelopment, East Leeds Orbital Route, and TransPennine Route upgrade.

Jacobs

Engineering | Global | HQ: USA

Proud to be based in South Leeds on the Beeston/Holbeck border, Jacobs employ around 350 people in the city and have delivered key infrastructure, transport and placemaking projects in the city and wider region.



BJSS

Technology | Global | HQ: Leeds

A local success story, BJSS grew from Leeds in 1993 to become a global technology consultant firm. The company employs around 400 people in Leeds.

Leeds Building Society

Finance | National | HQ: Leeds

Dating back to 1875, Leeds Building Society has its roots in Holbeck. Today it is one of the largest building societies in the UK and employs over 1,000 people in Leeds.



CEG

Property | National | HQ: London

Leeds is CEG's second home alongside its London HQ, with strong roots in the city. A smaller Anchor with around 50 Leeds staff, CEG is responsible for some of the city's major developments including Kirkstall Forge and Temple Works.

Mott MacDonald

Engineering | Global | HQ: London

First setting up office in Leeds in 2004, Mott MacDonald have played an important role delivering key projects in the city such as the David Oluwale Bridge and the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme. Having doubled its staff numbers to 300 in recent years, the company moved into 26 Whitehall Road in late 2023, increasing capacity by 50%.



INCENTIVES & BENEFITS FOR BUSINESSES

A clear framework for local impact

Most large businesses engage in social value activity, but this is a broad and complex field, with many accreditation schemes and frameworks to consider. Taking a place-based approach helps businesses to focus on the impact they can have locally, and provides a reason for businesses in an area to come together.

Leeds Business Anchors say that they appreciate having a relatively simple framework to use, and having a clear steer from the local authority about how they can make the most meaningful contribution to Leeds.

Place matters

Businesses want to have a meaningful relationship with the place where they operate, not least to build a connection to their office location at a time when employees have greater choice than ever about where they work.

Employee engagement

Employees are motivated by making a difference, and businesses are keen to support this to attract and retain talent. Businesses report that interview candidates increasingly ask about the company's social impact commitments.

Personal connections

Where local business leaders live in the city, have grown up there, or have a family there, there is additional personal motivation to see that place succeed.

Peer learning

Business Anchors report that sharing practical insights and experiences with each other is one of the key benefits of the network. Building trusted relationships over time has supported this.

Reputation and commercial opportunities

are also major incentives for businesses to engage in place-based activity, particularly those delivering public contracts with associated social value commitments.

HOW WAS THE NETWORK SET UP?

The network was set up by Leeds City Council, working with large businesses to test and develop the idea. The network is aimed at larger businesses as they have the potential to leverage the most impact because they employ large numbers of people and have larger procurement spends.

Recruitment started with 'Key Accounts' - the council's list of businesses that play a significant role in the city. A target list of businesses was identified based on those likely to be interested in being an Anchor, particularly those who were already demonstrating strong commitment to the city through their core business and social impact activity. Senior leaders in the council approached these businesses to test the idea and receive feedback. The concept of being an 'Anchor' was not always immediately familiar to businesses, but once explained, it was quickly understood - usually in terms of social value and local impact.

This engagement process took around a year, leading to a series of roundtables with businesses to scope how a network would function. The network was formally launched in September 2023. The requirement for businesses to join the network is to complete and return the Business Anchors Progression Framework to self-assess their current contribution to Leeds and set ambitions for progress. The council provided support to businesses (via consultants) to complete the progression framework.

Since launching the network, the emphasis is increasingly on businesses leading and owning the network, with the council supporting, providing advice, and helping to broker connections. The Chair and Secretariat roles are undertaken by individuals from the business members, and meetings are held at the business's offices, rotating venue each time so everyone gets a chance to host.

KEY STEPS TO SET UP A BUSINESS ANCHOR NETWORK— INSIGHTS FOR OTHER PLACES

- 1. Be clear on purpose.** Start with being clear about what you are trying to achieve through a business anchor network. Do you have an overarching strategy for your area that sets out the key priorities and ambitions? Which of these are things that businesses could influence?
- 2. Identify potential business anchors in your area.** Who are the influential businesses in your area, who are likely to be interested in being an Anchor? Consider which size of business you are aiming for, and which sectors are most important for your area.
- 3. Develop a proposal.** Get a proposal down in writing that sets out what you are trying to achieve and what you are asking from businesses. Think about the language you are use- your proposal needs to speak to the things that are important to businesses and gives them a reason to buy in (see our 'incentives' section for ideas). Bear in mind that 'Anchor' language may initially be unfamiliar, but businesses are likely to engage with ideas around place, social value, social impact and ESG (Environmental and Social Governance).
- 4. Test the idea with trusted contacts.** Are there business leaders and representatives in your area with whom you have trusted relationships? Use these contacts to ask for honest feedback help get the proposals right and overcome any potential barriers. Allow time, and a series of conversations, to develop your plans. You want the business leaders you are engaging with to feel invested in the initiative and take ownership.
- 5. Plan how you will engage and recruit businesses.** Develop a longlist of businesses to approach, and plan how you will engage and recruit them. Are there senior leaders in your area who have relationships with business leaders and can advocate for the proposal? It will probably take some time to go through this engagement process and you may need to try a few different routes. Be open that some businesses may not be interested at this time. This could be because they have other pressing priorities, or that they don't feel they have enough local decision-making discretion to contribute (particularly for larger firms whose headquarters are outside of your area). Focus on those who are enthusiastic about being early adopters, and keep the door open for others to come back later. Also bear in mind the relationships between the businesses you have recruited- do they know each other already? Are they competitors? Keep these dynamics in mind as you need to build collaborative relationships around a shared agenda.
- 6. Bring businesses together to agree the principles of engagement.** When you have enough businesses bought in (5-10 is a good start), build opportunities for them to meet each other and scope what the network will look like. Ensure you have a clear agreed sense of purpose, and decide some of the principles of engagement such as frequency of meetings, venue, and who will act as Chair and secretary. Setting these out in a Terms of Reference will provide clarity and help business representatives to explain the network to others in their organisation.
- 7. Plan for launch.** How and when you will formally launch the network? Should this be a high profile launch with media engagement, or do you want to start with a soft launch to allow the network to mature until you are ready to showcase externally? Take advice from communications and marketing colleagues about how to do this.

TIMELINE

2018

Leeds Anchor Network was established, bringing together some of the city's largest public sector and utility organisations to increase their collective contribution to Leeds. Over time, as the profile of the network has grown, there has been increasing interest from large corporate businesses in the city to be involved.

2020

During the Covid pandemic, Leeds City Council's Economic Policy team spoke to businesses about the support they needed from the council. As part of these conversations, businesses were asked for feedback about the idea of a local business anchor network for engaged businesses that want to contribute to the city.

2021

Leeds City Council commissioned consultants Les Newby and Nicky Denison to produce a framework to guide businesses about ways in which they can act as a local anchor-the Leeds Business Anchor Progression Framework.

2022

Funding from the Health Foundation gave the council capacity to take business anchors from an idea into reality. Using the Progression Framework, the Economic Policy team reached out to around 20 businesses to invite them to be part of a journey to develop a business anchors network. Over the course of the year, the team spoke to businesses and supported them to complete the progression framework.

2023

Two roundtables were held with businesses to develop the idea of a business anchors network. The network was launched in September 2023, and had its first official meeting in November.

2024

In March 2024 the Business Anchors formally met with members of Leeds Anchor Network for the first time. Connections between the two networks will be further strengthened over time.

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS?

While the network is still relatively new, there are indications that members are behaving differently because of being a Business Anchor. Examples include:

- Taking a more strategic approach to grant-giving by working through local third sector bodies to reach the recipients who would most benefit from grant funding.
- Approaching the council for advice on commissioning a local, up and coming artist to provide artwork for a new office.
- Developing an office plan for local impact in response to the Progression Framework.
- Using their professional expertise to contribute to the Leeds Marmot City programme to tackle health inequality.
- Adopting the West Yorkshire Fair Work Charter

Undertaking the self-assessment process helped us identify several areas where progress could be made.

This process was a driving force to initiate our #BrilliantNeighbours Programme to show how a socially responsible, people-based business can inspire others to get more involved to address issues such as the climate emergency. Having successfully piloted this programme in Leeds, we now have #BrilliantNeighbours activities underway in over 10 cities across the UK.

Lisa Littlefair, Cities Lead at Mott MacDonald

The network are in the process of identifying priorities for collective action, with a current focus on apprenticeships and early careers.

As the journey of Leeds Business Anchors progresses, this Playbook will be kept live to share new developments, insights and learnings.

CASE STUDIES



Nearly 150 years since founding as a mutual Society, Leeds Building Society are delivering towards their purpose of "putting home ownership within reach of more people, generation after generation". Leeds Building Society used the Business Anchors Progression Framework to sense check their Responsible Business strategy.

[Read more](#) →



Arup Leeds used the Business Anchors Progression Framework to engage its office team around action they could take to positively impact the city and local communities, and used this to develop an action plan. Their Leeds office was the first in the UK to develop a Know Your City plan.

[Read more](#) →



"Being part of the Leeds Business Anchors Framework has inspired our staff to drive environmental and social positive change within the communities they live and work in, encouraging creativity and innovation, leading to greater staff motivation and retention".

[Read more](#) →