1. What does citizenship and civic engagement mean in the 21st century? Why does it matter, and how does it relate to questions of identity?

The citizens of Leeds create its vibrancy - a city which has an undeniably strong identity within the nation, and a great belief in itself. Citizens have created that identity, continue to contribute to its successes, and share in its limitations.

Active participation in citizenship takes many forms, from one of the longest established carnivals in Europe, celebrating its 50th anniversary, to welcoming millions of visitors to Leeds and the wider Yorkshire of which it is part. From creating jobs, to supporting incoming communities - Leeds has sufficient belief in itself to be able to showcase its successes and share them with the rest of the world.

The wider success of the city’s economy, cultural and sporting life masks real differences. Whilst Leeds has amongst the highest level of business start-ups in the country, the highest growth of private sector jobs and is the strongest centre for digital growth outside London, at the same time we grapple with slow productivity growth, lower levels of 16-64 year olds with NVQ4 or higher, low levels of exports, 150,000 people living within the 10 most deprived wards in England and 80,000 people in jobs paying less than the Real Living wage. Leeds has long been recognised as having a ‘twin track’ economy, with communities living in close proximity having very different expectations of life and life experiences, due to their ability or otherwise to share and gain from our economic successes.

In this context, civic engagement and identity are complex and multi-layered concepts. Some people and communities may be fully engaged in their locality, or in their community of interest, but not engaged in the city as a whole. For example, some of those communities with the highest levels of poverty and poorly paid jobs, have created the vibrancy and success of the aforementioned carnival. These successes may have a life of their own, and may often be outside of, or in addition to the leadership which comes from business, from politicians, or from other sectors.

Leeds considers its multi-dimensional diversity as a strength, and we are working hard to ensure we tackle income inequality, with targeted discussions and actions on how to improve living conditions and incomes for those at the bottom of the income/wealth distribution. Consequently, we have a focus on ensuring that all parts of the community can share equally in its success and recognise that the resilience, strength and engagement of diverse communities comes in many different forms.

The citizens of Leeds already demonstrate self-reliance, and the ability to engage. Enhancing the positive influence communities have over their own lives and the lives of those around them helps solve society’s challenges and engenders a sense of being part of a greater whole. Underpinning this is civic engagement - when citizens are involved on a more practical level in the political process and in tackling local issues (or in maximising the impact of local assets). Civic partners and communities can engage with each other as contributors to the local economy and civic life.
This has increased in importance following the Brexit debate, during which substantial parts of the UK demonstrated dis-engagement from politics in general, and cynicism about civic life. The outcome has created potential for people to feel un-wanted and dis-engaged – often leading to further increases in hate crime, mental health issues and people feeling they have to leave the UK despite contributing positively to the local economy.

The Lord Chancellor in 1998 said “'We should not, must not, dare not, be complacent about the health and future of British democracy. Unless we become a nation of engaged citizens, our democracy is not secure.”

It is essential to support harmony, good inter-cultural relationships and for people to feel safe and welcome. Similarly, positive interventions that reduce tensions in society, underpin collective action and support the development of shared values bring citizens together. From this work a sense of citizenship will flow.

Leeds is working proactively with local citizens on the above challenges.

2. Citizenship is partly about membership and belonging. Are there ways we could strengthen people’s identity as citizens, whether they are citizens by birth or naturalisation? Could citizenship ceremonies or events throughout the educational process play a role? Should pride in being or becoming British be encouraged?

A measure of success is the extent to which citizens are currently engaged in wider society. This takes many forms, and whilst some engagement may be seen as ‘passive’, for example watching sport, following a football team can actually be one of the most highly engaged forms of self-identity and wider belonging.

Shared events are an essential part of this, however equally (or perhaps more) important are opportunities to celebrate togetherness, shared values and positive social action. In Leeds these include large- scale events such as Leeds West Indian Carnival and Leeds Pride, along with the recent ‘Great Get Together’ Initiative and a whole range of smaller, more localised festivals and galas in all parts of the city; examples include the Kirkstall and Chapel Allerton festivals, the Beeston, Gipton, Hunslet, Middleton and Seacroft galas, and many others. It is notable again that many of these take place in some of the most disadvantaged communities in the city. In addition the Lord Mayor has an annual event to celebrate and thank very small, volunteer led groups for helping make Leeds a better place. Identity is also closely associated, for great numbers of people, with their religious or spiritual beliefs, , which in many forms contributes to how people engage with wider society.

People need to feel accepted and part of a shared purpose, this is vital at a local level. However, this shared purpose may not always contribute positively to society. People can be surrounded by influences that reinforce their negative perceptions of the society around them (e.g. media, extremist groups, peer groups etc.). Consequently it is essential that these negative influencers are countered by positive interactions and influences, and that this begins in early childhood, supported by communities and all service providers with which a person comes in contact (e.g. schools, social/sports groups, DWP, employers).

An example of local work is a series of Breakthrough Projects (led by Leeds City Council),
focusing on tackling shared priorities, one of which is “Strong communities benefitting from a strong city”.

The aim of this work is to ensure:

“Leeds is a welcoming city, a city of sanctuary and one with a growing economy and increasingly diverse population. Whilst Leeds is one of the fastest growing cities in the UK—we know that not everyone is benefiting equally from the city’s economic success and there are high levels of deprivation in our city. This project works to deliver the Council’s strong economy, compassionate city ambition and to ensure Leeds is a welcoming city with cohesive, resilient and sustainable communities”. This project aims to:

a. Improve resilience
b. Sustain neighbourhoods
c. Promote civility, mutual understanding and cohesion
d. Promote conversations and redefine community level problem solving
e. Develop capacity to resolve and mediate conflict
f. Raise aspirations, particularly amongst the young
g. Align council service delivery to community need, and
h. Improve access to opportunities in the city.

These aims are underpinned by a range of specific projects/activities delivered be a range of partners across Leeds – more detail is available on request.

3. Civic engagement can be seen as both a responsibility and a right of citizenship. Beyond the existing legal framework, should citizens have additional formal rights and responsibilities? How do you see the relationship between the two? Should they have the force of law individually or be presented as reciprocal duties between citizen and state? How should they be monitored and/or enforced?

Leeds City Council and partners in other sectors have set out what they see as being the key characteristics of a thriving community, amongst which the key is:

“Members of the community feel they have control over their own lives, and influence over their own futures; they understand their role, and their contribution to the common good is recognised.”

The concept of enforcement is not recognised within this document. The statement represents a compact between the citizens and the city, each holding the other to account. It does however require commitment on both sides, a commitment by civic leaders to seek engagement, and a commitment by communities to participate. Success or failure is measured by the health and sustainability of communities, by the degree to which communities are heard, by the extent to which they are asked to contribute.

Leeds Social Value charter has been developed by the local third sector and City Council and subsequently adopted by all other key strategic partners. The Charter sets out the commitment of partners in the city to promote social responsibility, deliver social, environmental, and economic value, and maximise the impact in Leeds of the “Leeds pound”. This is set within the context of a vision for Leeds as a healthy, fair, compassionate and welcoming city in which its citizens benefit from the city’s economic growth. The charter
asserts that the continued success of Leeds is dependent on enterprising and thriving private, public and third sector partners that work together, alongside active citizens and local communities, for the benefit of the whole city.

Leeds also has a ‘Social Contract’ with some of its citizens which seeks to support more active engagement with communities in the delivery of local services and promotes initiatives that aim to deliver local improvements, support the common good and underpin good community relations.

4. Do current laws encourage active political engagement? What are your views on changes to the franchise for national or local elections, including lowering the voting age? Should changes be made to the voting process or the voting registration process?

With the support of statutory agencies in Leeds, an extensive network of forums operates within the third sector and beyond; including a network for the organisations and activities who seek to engage children and young people in the wider life of the city. Through this work there is an ongoing broad range of activities, including a recent deputation from the Leeds Youth Parliament to a Full Council meeting which led the council to support their request for the voting age to be reduced. As a result, the Leader of Leeds City Council subsequently wrote to the Minister concerned to give support for reducing the minimum age for voting to 16.

There is a growing view that the voting age can no longer be different from that at which a person may legally marry, and the engagement of young people should include a consultation, which includes them, on how that could and should be achieved.

The annual ‘Make Your Mark’ youth consultation in the UK was very successful in Leeds. Schools, youth groups and Leeds Youth Councillors worked to get as many young people in Leeds to take part in the ballot. In Leeds, 14,308 young people (20% youth population) from all communities took part in choosing the issue that is most important to them. In Leeds the fourth most important issue for young people was ‘Votes at 16’: 1660 votes.

The rapidly growing access to digital voting may also be one of those areas which should be open to consultation, and may also be a way of involving younger and more mobile people in political processes.

5. What should be the role of education in teaching and encouraging good citizenship? At what stages, from primary school through to university, should it be (a) available, and (b) compulsory? Should there be any exemptions? Should there be more emphasis on political participation, both inside and outside classes? How effective is current teaching? Do the curriculum and the qualifications that are currently offered need amending?

Education is clearly crucial, however identity seems as much influenced by issues in which people are engaged by choice outside of formal education. Where people feel they are left behind, ignored, that their views are not valued or even sought, are less likely to have a sense of belonging, and no amount of instruction will change their minds. Education can help frame the choices people make in their wider lives. Choices may be made within education which opens wider horizons for those involved, which could include volunteering; however volunteering should always remain voluntary otherwise its value is minimized. There clearly
should be a place within a formal curriculum for young people to learn about the role of a citizen, and it is likely that this happens, informally at present, through various topics from history to aspects of social studies in all its forms. Mock elections have taken place within school settings over many years, and real elections are used to appoint to school positions held by students in many schools. Standardisation could come from reviewing the curriculum, but it is more likely that imaginative use of informal processes within the education system will be equally effective. It could be a measure of a good school to enquire to what extent they extend responsibility and involvement to students in constructive ways to encourage engagement and active citizenship.

Migration into the city in recent years, including from the European Union, has created a vibrant and dynamic school population, where over 190 languages are now spoken. This increase has brought both advantages in terms of the vibrancy of the school population and also challenges with pressure on some schools to cope with additional place demands and a need to ensure that all children do well at learning. Schools have developed a broad range of quality teaching techniques that are helping to improve education for all groups in our schools and to help ensure all pupils feel part of the community.

6. **Do voluntary citizenship programmes such as the National Citizen Service do a good job of creating active citizens? Are they the right length? Should they be compulsory, and if so, when? Should they include a greater political element? Should they lead to a more public citizenship ceremony? Are they good value for money? What other routes exist for creating active citizens?**

When volunteering becomes compulsory it is no longer volunteering (it becomes unpaid work experience) and its value is much reduced. A national programme can provide the framework and could include learning about the political process; however delivery should be more closely associated with those who already provide volunteering programmes. Similarly, activity to support active citizenship should relate to the participant’s own community/neighbourhood or city and aim to impact on local priorities. Provision should also always push beyond areas/places where we know young people will chose to get involved and into communities where they least likely to access mainstream opportunities.

Volunteering could be an option within a formal curriculum as long as it remains optional. It could have a theory and exam associated with it.

7. **How can society support civic engagement? What responsibility should central government, devolved and local governments, third sector organisations and the individual have for encouraging civic engagement? What can the Government and Parliament do to support civil society initiatives to increase civic engagement?**

We need to champion the importance of civic engagement and encourage more people to be more involved as it helps create a more engaged and democratic community.

If we work on the basis that communities naturally wish to engage, then the role of elected and paid leaders is to ensure that barriers to engagement are removed. If we need to sell the idea of engagement, we should be questioning whether the right questions are being asked. In Leeds we are working to provide the resources and structures that enable citizens to take
control for themselves, on the assumption that this will lead to more local people becoming involved – in the workplace, in schools and in communities.

When people see local politics as a route to take more control over their lives, they are unlikely to need further encouragement to get involved in political processes - not necessarily by taking a paid position, but by voting, getting involved in local initiatives and volunteering.

We recognise that it is people who create communities and communities which create towns and cities; that the purpose of local and central government is to meet the needs of individuals and communities. However, once created, government (whether central or local) can take on a life and role of its own and become the focus of leadership; especially as it has the resources within its grasp to do those things which no individual or community can achieve. Central government needs to create the context in which civic engagement can happen and provide tangible support to local governments to proactively encourage it at a local level. The key risk associated with leadership, power and difficult challenges is that it can lead to being defensive; locally we strive to share information - about budgets, issues, crises and work - with stakeholders and people and then co-create solutions - aiming for it to be bottom up, not top down.

Many Third Sector Organisations are based on the concept of democracy, fairness, engagement, all of which are key values for civic engagement. It’s a core part of how we work, relying on “leading without authority” and helping people to help themselves. Their responsibility is to demonstrate best practice and the benefits of this type of approach to other sectors, as well as encouraging the values and ethos of the third sector to permeate whole society. There remains, however, a risk that an over reliance on contracts leads Third Sector organisations to see funders as their primary customers and therefore to meet their needs first, however, smart approaches to (re)commissioning help tackle this. Government is also based on a formal structure of representative democracy at all levels. It is in the processes between democratic elections that “engagement” has its part to play, recognising that it is always the “detail” which has its impact, finally, on communities.

Government can support engagement as a necessary part of democracy, filling in the gaps between the formal process – removing obstacles to involvement, reducing austerity measures, looking at the true impact of decisions such as welfare benefits reform, taking time out to listen to local people and take on board their concerns, providing potential funding for local projects. For example, to support integration and involvement of migrant communities in society there needs to be a much better understanding of migrant rights, entitlements and responsibilities (by both migrants and service providers) and of the services that are available to migrants. Indeed, many services providing advice to migrants are unclear on the services that are available to meet migrant needs, including those offered by third sector providers and community based activities.

Lack of knowledge and information further compound the problems caused by the challenges highlighted above, impeding the ability of migrants to make informed choices. This reinforces the need for access to advocacy; advice; legal support; integration; navigation and informed social networks.
8. What are the values that all of us who live in Britain should share and support? Can you identify any threats to these values, which affect the citizenship of, for instance, women or various minority groups? If so, how can their citizenship be strengthened?

There almost certainly is a set of values which are common to most people, but agreeing what those are may be problematic. Ultimately, people’s values are strongly influenced by how the world treats them, and what society can do is develop a framework (such as the Declaration of Human Rights) but it is almost impossible to impose values on individuals. Leeds has developed a shared set of characteristics which we feel define a thriving community, on the understanding that all organisations should support the achievement of one or more of these characteristics – from this approach, shared values and understanding should follow.

Our ambition for Leeds is to be a compassionate city with a strong economy – for example, migrant communities are valuable contributors to the city’s economy, culture and diversity and Leeds aspires to ensure people are welcomed and supported. Leeds has a long-held commitment to support asylum seekers and refugees and is dedicated to being a city of sanctuary. It is well known that many refugees play an active and invaluable role economically and whilst many asylum seekers are not permitted to work, many are active in their communities participating in volunteering and so make a huge contribution to the civic and cultural life of the city.

9. Why do so many communities and groups feel “left behind”? Are there any specific factors which act as barriers to active citizenship faced by different communities or groups - white, BME, young, old, rural, urban? How might these barriers be overcome?

When individuals and communities see a disparity between the values which we are thought to hold dear (see Qu. 8) and the way those values are implemented, they feel that they are, as the question suggests, “left behind”. Some examples:

- People and groups living and operating in the more deprived communities see some people getting richer and being more successful and feel cut off from this because of their own personal circumstances. They see the gap widening in society.

- Our ambition is for people in Leeds to be safe, feel safe and live their lives in strong cohesive communities. Being safe is a concern for all communities in Leeds. It is particularly relevant to migrant communities given increases in reported and unreported hate crime following the EU referendum, planned changes to legislation, the potential consequences of Brexit on some migrant communities and the negative perceptions of migrants in some communities which contribute to a feeling of unease in what feels to migrants, a hostile environment. Unfortunately many migrant families also live in areas of the country that are most deprived where they are often seen as being in competition with the local community, so they face issues of acceptance as well as facing poverty and disadvantage.

- Young people are more transient. They no longer grow up, study and work in the same area. They may only be in a city for the period they are at college or university and then move on and have to regularly re-create local roots. The rise of social media means face-to-face contact and local engagement reduces so they potentially feel less connected to their local physical community.
- Older people may become more isolated as they live longer but often with health and mobility issues. The concept of looking after the extended family is breaking down, even in cultural situations where this has hitherto been a core part of their culture (e.g. Indian families).

- People living in rural communities face a reduction in local services as shops, petrol stations and pubs find it harder to be economically successful so local services are reduced.

- Many disabled people face isolation due to not being able to access appropriate public transport (wheelchair accessible taxis, trains and buses). The welfare reforms also prevent some of them from being able to afford to participate in activities that promote cohesion.

To overcome barriers we need to look at the situation that the various “excluded” groups are in and discuss, with them, how they can overcome barriers as opposed to imposing solutions that people who are not in that situation think are a good idea. We need to encourage more cross-sector/cross community interaction i.e. young and old, black and white. A local example of this where elected members and people with learning disabilities (LD) ‘swap seats’ and use the council chamber to debate issue that matter to people with LD. This has then developed into a reference group called the People’s Parliament and there is an annual meeting (using this format). This work has created a much greater understanding of the priorities for the LD community and has also created long lasting relationships between the influencers/politicians/decision makers in the city, and people with LD who, historically, struggled to be heard.

10. How do you see the relationship between citizenship and civic engagement on the one hand and social cohesion and integration on the other? What effect does the level of diversity in schools and workplaces have on integration in society as a whole? How can diversity and integration be increased concurrently?

Civic engagement and social cohesion are very closely inter-linked. If people don’t feel part of the local community, don’t see themselves as active, local citizens they potentially have less interest in and incentive to get more involved. This leads to isolation and the creation of ghetto-type communities. They potentially develop less respect for traditional (positive) values and laws/regulations, as they don’t see themselves as part of that local society, which can lead to civic unrest, crime and disaffection. We need to develop more mutual respect for other people’s cultures, traditions, values, religious beliefs. We need to take more time out to learn and listen. We need to embrace local diversity and see how this adds to society.

We must aim to ensure that the level of increased diversity in places like Leeds adds to community cohesion by encouraging greater integration but we face a situation whereby we have different generations of people being involved. Some of the first-wave migrants from the Caribbean and Asia found it hard to integrate, some still have language difficulties which are a real barrier to integration. Their children are now the first generation to be born in the UK and they are now of an age when some of them are also having children. These subsequent generations often feel very British – this is their home, they have shared values, they are born and grow up in a physical space and cannot see why they are not accepted as being a citizen of this country, because that’s very much how they feel.

We need to celebrate diversity, bust the myths, encourage people to learn about different
cultures, find role models from all communities and highlight what they bring to society. We need to encourage people from different backgrounds to both work and play together, to create stronger local communities.

11. How important are levels of English proficiency for first and second generation immigrants and what could be done to increase them, including through support for ESOL classes? Are there particular barriers faced by newcomers to Britain? Could the naturalisation process, including the citizenship test, be improved and if so, how?

The changes to population in Leeds are set against a backdrop of ongoing immigration legislative changes, uncertainty following Brexit, sustained financial challenges to public sector services and a decline in migrant third sector funding. Local research has identified four key cross cutting challenges experienced across migrant groups which need to be addressed in order to meet shared migrant need. These are:

- An improved understanding of migrant rights, entitlements and responsibilities by both migrants and service providers, in particular, a better understanding of immigration status. The research findings suggest that this understanding could be improved by services being more supportive in their approach to migrants and facilitating access to services helping migrants to feel more welcomed and supported.

- Inadequate access to available services as a consequence of a lack of knowledge amongst migrants of the services that are available to them. Indeed, many services providing advice to migrants are unclear on the services that are available to meet migrant needs, including those offered by third sector providers and community based activities.

- Language barriers contribute to ineffective communication and present a significant hurdle to migrants when accessing services. Moreover, even when English is spoken by a migrant, or, when interpreter provision is available, there can still be gaps in communication and a fuller appreciation of the context for the migrant.

- Lack of knowledge and information further compound the problems caused by the challenges articulated in points 1-3 above, impeding the ability of migrants to make informed choices. This impedance reinforces the need for access to: advocacy; advice; legal support; integration; navigation and informed social networks.

ESOL classes are a fundamental necessity and require national resourcing.

12. Can you give examples of initiatives and role models that have helped promote a positive vision of British Citizenship within a tolerant and cohesive society?

Some positive examples from Leeds are:

- West Indian Carnival – is a celebration of the history of African-Caribbean people and their cultures but is fully integrated into the Leeds calendar and enjoyed by people of all colours and creeds, and ages.
• The Leeds bid for European City of Culture is an opportunity to showcase and celebrate the city’s diversity.

• Leeds Pride celebrates the city’s thriving LGBT+ community and is one of the last remaining free Pride events, attracting visitors from across the country.

• Light Night Leeds is an annual free multi-arts and light festival which takes over Leeds City Centre over two nights and attracts thousands of Leeds’ residents. A range of volunteering opportunities places communities at the heart of the event.

• Local celebrations recognising the impact of major sporting events (e.g. the Olympics and Paralympics) and the way that this creates positive local role models (Nicola Adams, the Brownlee brothers, Kadija Khan) for people that engender a sense of civic pride and provide inspiration.

• Leeds Young Peoples Leadership Programme Leadership Days, a programme aimed to develop the leadership, confidence and influence of young people from the Muslim community, engendering a new generation of young people equipped with the skills and understanding to play a more active role in the city’s success.

• Migrant Access Project Plus (MAP+) - Leeds has been successful in securing funding through the government’s Controlling Migration Programme. The funding will build on the existing award-winning Leeds MAP and provide for additional MAP satellites in West and South Leeds to address issues and concerns in relation to:
  - working with residents to minimise low level tensions in communities and aid integration
  - ensuring migrants access services in the most efficient and effective way with a view to reducing costs and pressures on services.

8 September 2017