



## City profile

## City profile – Leeds

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## ABSTRACT

Leeds is the third largest Metropolitan District in the United Kingdom and the administrative and employment centre of the Yorkshire and the Humber region in the north of England. From being dominated initially by textiles and clothing manufacture, it has seen the development of engineering and the rise of services, notably business and financial services, to produce what remains a relatively diverse local economy. It has been transformed from an industrial to a services dominated city but one retaining important elements of its manufacturing past. A city in a unitary state, the profile traces developments in the city's political economy through the lens of central–local state relationships and the recent transition from urban government to evolving forms of urban governance: from the entrepreneurial municipal city of Victorian times to the current attempts by the local council to reinvigorate 'civic enterprise' in the aftermath of recession and the current Government's austerity programme and localism agenda.

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### Introduction – Leeds a leading second-tier city, economically powerful city-region and exemplar of the shift from local government to local governance

Leeds is the United Kingdom's third largest Metropolitan District with a population, according to the 2011 Census, of 751,500 people. Its boundaries cover some 552 square kilometres with a built-up area to the centre and south surrounded by a number of separate small towns and villages in a polycentric pattern.

The city's growth has been built on the diversity and innovativeness of its economic base and its evolution as a regional administrative and commercial centre (see, for example, [Counce & Honeyman, 1993](#); [Fraser, 1980a](#); [Reeder & Rodger, 2000](#)). It has been transformed from a town of industry and commerce to a services-dominated city but one retaining important elements of its manufacturing past (see [Fig. 1](#)).

Like all cities in advanced capitalist economies, its market-driven local economy has been conditioned by national and local state regulation and intervention. So too has its social and physical infrastructure. Part and parcel of this process have been the various attempts by the local state to intervene in what is now referred to as 'place making', which is itself shaped by the balance of powers and changing relationships between central and local government. It is a member of the Core Cities group of English cities that, for the past two decades, has lobbied for the devolution of central

government powers to city administrations to loosen what the group views as the constraints that cities experience in influencing local economic development as a direct consequence of the over-centralisation of these powers.<sup>1</sup> Local government, from its heyday in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has seen its powers and autonomy relative to the central state significantly diminished ([Daunton, 2000](#); [Hunt, 2004](#); [John & Copus, 2011](#); [Loughlin, Gefland, & Young, 1985](#)). And these changing central and local state relations, in the last three decades, provide the backcloth for the much-debated transition from urban government to urban governance ([Brenner, 2004](#); [Hall & Hubbard, 1996](#); [Harding, 2005](#); [Pierre, 1999, 2011](#); [Stoker, 1997, 2000, 2005](#)). [Cole and John \(2001\)](#) identify three formative elements of local governance: institutional fragmentation; the blurring of boundaries between public, private and societal actors; and the prominent role played by inter-organisational policy networks and new forms of coordination. In England, institutional fragmentation has mainly been seen in the growth of non-elected agencies performing specific policy functions, often in competition with locally elected authorities. The Urban Development Corporations of the 1980s are one example of this fragmentation, the Training and Enterprise Councils of the 1990s are another.

Central government has been instrumental in the blurring of boundaries between public and private sectors through deregulation, contracting of local authority services, encouragement of public–private partnerships, the creation of new

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Core Cities' group comprises: Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne, Nottingham, Sheffield...and Leeds.



**Fig. 1.** Leeds at night – Headrow looking east. Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/36705665@N04/3385767347/>. Author: Andrew Roberts This photo has creative commons license. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Leedsnight.jpg>.

special-purpose agencies and emphasising the individual as consumer of services. Inter-organisational networks have risen in prominence with new participants from the private sector and quasi-public agencies. Thus, while cities remain important deliverers of statutory services, they do so under strong central government control and direction. And it is in this context that cities have sought to augment their powers for local development though developing forms of governance variously involving partnerships with the private sector, other public and quasi-public sector agencies operating locally, and, more recently, the voluntary and community sectors. There is thus, as [Cole and John \(2001\)](#) also stress, a locality-level dimension to governance that can be seen, for example, in the different ways in which localities adapt to changing funding regimes, in policy experimentation and also in the differential presence and activism of local interest groups. And this locality-level dimension can be very clearly seen in Leeds' recent history.

In terms specifically of economic development, the shift from government to governance in England has also involved the rescaling of city governance arrangements to the wider city-region. In Leeds this has resulted in the formation, by voluntary inter-municipal agreement, of the Leeds City Region – a relatively self-contained functional economic sub-region that is also polycentric in structure based on differing degrees of interdependence between the core city and cities, towns and villages in ten other local authority administrations ([Fig. 2](#)).<sup>2</sup> This City Region has a population of just under 3 million people and is the second largest functional sub-national economy after the capital. It also provides the geography for the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) recently set up in response to the latest central government initiative for promoting sub-national economic growth.

This profile is structured around key phases in the evolution of Leeds' government and governance. It begins with the city's rise up the urban hierarchy with industrialisation and the development of municipal self-government. The second section positions the city in the inter-war and post war period of economic and political transition and the beginnings of municipal decline. The third section covers the transition from the post-war Keynesian management of the economy to the variants of neo-liberalism taking hold from the mid to late 1970s and the gradual shift to urban

governance as central–local state relations continued to change. This period is marked in the 1990s by a corporatist approach that followed recession and central government seeking to tip the balance of powers between itself and local government further in its favour. Civic corporatism was gradually tempered with civic welfare concerns in the 2000s in a period of socially and spatially polarised growth and also in the context of more collaborative central local government relationships. The profile concludes with the local authority's current attempts to re-shape urban governance through a reinvigorated concept of 'civic enterprise' in the challenging context of recession and central government's austerity programme and localism agenda.

### Industrialisation and the growth of the Victorian entrepreneurial city

The city is the product of a historical layering of waves of investment starting with cloth production in the 14th century to the cotton manufactures of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that formed the motor of rapid industrialisation. Investment in raw material production, transport connections through waterways, roads and rail strengthened the economic base. Innovative production methods in textile production and machinery drove the development of a local engineering industry. These waves of investment all combined to produce the 'structured coherence' ([Harvey, 1985, chap. 6](#)) that positioned the city firmly in the northern industrial segment of the national spatial division of labour – with industrialised cities and regions linked East and West to the global economy and Empire in the 1880s and 1890s. And local politics played a key role in the development of this structured coherence.

Leeds became a powerful industrial and commercial city with the local Council at the centre of its governance operating alongside private companies to provide local services. The 1835 Municipal Reform Act set the foundations for elected multi-functional local self-government ([Wilson & Game, 2011](#)) and for the creation of powerful urban authorities with broad social and economic, as well as, judicial and political functions ([Fraser, 1982](#)). Central government actually accorded relatively few powers to municipalities with the Act. Power was accumulated principally through a succession of local Improvement Acts and private bill legislation in a municipal revolution that took local authorities, Leeds included, from the corporation reform of the 1830s to the 'municipal

<sup>2</sup> The city-region administrations comprise the 10 shown on the map plus North Yorkshire County Council.

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