

Leeds North West Liberal Democrats Diversity Awareness statement

Context

Please see the **Appendix** (end of document) for graphs and pie charts showing the demographics of Leeds North West local party members, set alongside the demographics of the local population where possible.

These reveal that our local party membership is a reasonably good match for the local community in most areas. However, there is definitely scope for improvement in our representation of the following key groups:

- Women
- Young people
- People from BAME backgrounds
- People from lower socio-economic backgrounds

Of these, the place where we are most obviously out of step with the local population is in our age profile. This shows up particularly clearly in the 20-29 age bracket. It stems from the high proportion of students and young professionals living in the seat, caused by the fact that the University of Leeds and Leeds Beckett University lie just to the south and Leeds Beckett has a smaller satellite campus in the seat.

Councillors and candidates

At Parliamentary level, Leeds North West was held by Greg Mulholland MP from 2005 to 2017. Our PPC selection in 2018 was open to all candidates. We shortlisted four men and one woman, and selected a British Asian Muslim PPC, Kamran Hussain. Sadly, Kamran was not elected: a reflection on the electoral circumstances at the time rather than his leadership or the quality of the campaign.

At city council level, 5 of the 12 council seats in Leeds North West are currently held by Liberal Democrats. All 5 are white able-bodied men in middle age or above, though one is LGBT+. This clearly does not reflect the demographic diversity of the local population. However, it is partly the result of wider difficulties in winning seats locally.

In 2010, we had 9 out of 12 city councillors in the seat. This included two women and three younger men, one of whom was LGBT+. Since then, losses and retirements have reduced the number to 5, of whom 4 were already councillors in 2010.

We have therefore lacked opportunities to increase the diversity of our city councillors by getting new candidates elected. However, the candidates we have selected have been more demographically diverse than our current councillors.

Out of 15 candidates selected since 2010 who were not already sitting councillors, 10 have been male (6 older, 4 younger) and 5 female. 4 have also been LGBT+, two British Asian and one mixed race.

We clearly still have room for improvement in identifying and developing diverse activists and encouraging them to put themselves forward as candidates. However, the quickest route to improving the diversity of our councillors will be to get more of the diverse candidates whom we are already selecting elected.

One sign of this is the much better gender balance in our group on Otley town council, where we are stronger electorally and hold 12 out of the 15 seats. Here, our councillors are 7 men and 5 women, so we have come close to achieving gender parity. Although most are over 50, we put up two candidates in their twenties at recent by-elections, and successfully got one of them elected.

Membership

One of our biggest problems as a local party is a lack of person-power. Our council wards have an electorate of 15-20,000 people each, and take very intensive campaigning to win. However, we only have a small team of activists willing and able to knock on doors and deliver leaflets. Our total membership in the seat is c. 240, but those who campaign actively probably number only around 40.

This makes it extremely difficult to do anything other than maintain basic campaign activity, because the people who do this are heavily overloaded and do not have the time and energy to do anything else. We are caught in a vicious cycle of struggling to improve our situation for want of resources, and this includes improving our diversity.

We are therefore currently working on ways to increase our membership numbers and engagement, since we will struggle to make much improvement without doing this.

Community engagement, council activity and campaigns

Below are some examples from the last few years (with dates where time-specific) of activity which we have undertaken on the council, in campaigning and within our local communities aimed at helping and supporting under-privileged groups:

- March 2019: Otley anti-racism rally. Our city councillors, town councillors, mayor and PPC attended and the Lib Dem leader of Otley town council spoke.
- April 2020: campaign to save Leeds Sailing and Activity Centre, which is used by people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with disabilities.
- Summer 2020: check-in phone calls with older residents over COVID.
- September 2020: Leeds Liberal Democrat councillors put forward a council motion proposing a Universal Basic Income to replace the failing benefits system and support the economic fall out from Covid-19.
- April 2021: Kamran Hussain and Headingley activist Brandon Ashford volunteered at Woodsley Road Community Centre food bank.
- September 2021: Brandon Ashford requested a declaration from LCC Parks team that all parks are accessible for people with physically diverse and neurodiverse backgrounds.
- Weetwood councillors regularly support InterACT Pantry in Meanwood, a membership food club providing good quality low cost food.

- Otley town councillors are actively in Otley Welcomes, a group formed to tackle racism, xenophobia and hate crime and help migrants feel welcome in Otley.
- Otley town councillors are also involved with Otley Action for Older People.
- We normally have a walking group in the Leeds Pride parade every year, though were unable to do this in 2020 or 2021 as there was no physical parade.

Record of action on diversity and inclusion in the local party

These are the steps we have taken to improve the diversity of the local party so far:

- January 2020: Appointed a Diversity Officer to our local exec: Sharon Slinger, with professional experience of improving diversity in the construction industry.
- February 2020: Sharon was granted access to our social media accounts, and has established a regular routine of posting content to mark events in the national party's diversity calendar.
- July 2020: Mentoring introduced for first-time council candidate applicants. This is designed to help those new to selections navigate a complicated process. The mentor is an experienced local member who can answer queries and provide neutral advice.
- September 2020: As Yorkshire & Humber Regional Diversity Champion, Sharon set up a monthly regional Diversity Officers meeting to provide support and share knowledge. They have had speakers from LGBT+ Lib Dems, HQ Equality Manager, Lib Dem Campaign for Racial Equality, Lib Dem Disability Association and Kirklees Visual Impairment Network.
- May 2021: Formed a Membership Strategy group, chaired by our Diversity Officer, to develop an action plan for membership engagement and growth.
- June 2021: Draft Diversity and Inclusion strategy presented to the Leeds North West executive committee, based on the work of the Membership Strategy group. This covered the demographic makeup of the seat, how that relates to membership of the local party, and how we could improve our match with the local community. It has informed much of this Diversity Awareness statement.

Action Plan (May 2021 onwards)

Increase membership and improve engagement

- Target: increase membership by 10% in first year (i.e. by May 2022)
- June 2021: membership survey to identify interests and priorities
- July 2021 onwards: resident surveying in target wards with built-in recruitment for strong prospects. Some of this is taking place in areas of council housing, so is one way to reach people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- August 2021: sent out first members newsletter for several years
- August 2021: phone-round of members in one of our target wards to let them know it was a target and identify potential help and support.

Revive the Leeds Young Liberals group

- In previous years, there has been an active local Liberal Youth / Young Liberals group, organised primarily via a student society at the University of Leeds.

However, membership of this group declined over the coalition years and no new committee was elected at the end of the 2019-20 academic year.

- August 2021: regained admin rights over the old LYL social media accounts, and appointed a new committee with Brandon Ashford as LYL President.
- September 2021: LYL Freshers activity. Aim is to be on at least the University of Leeds campus (and possibly other local Unis) with YL freshers materials, seeking to recruit enough new members to reconstitute the student society.
- Goal this time is to actively recruit YL members from across Leeds: not just students at the University of Leeds.

Engage with local community groups

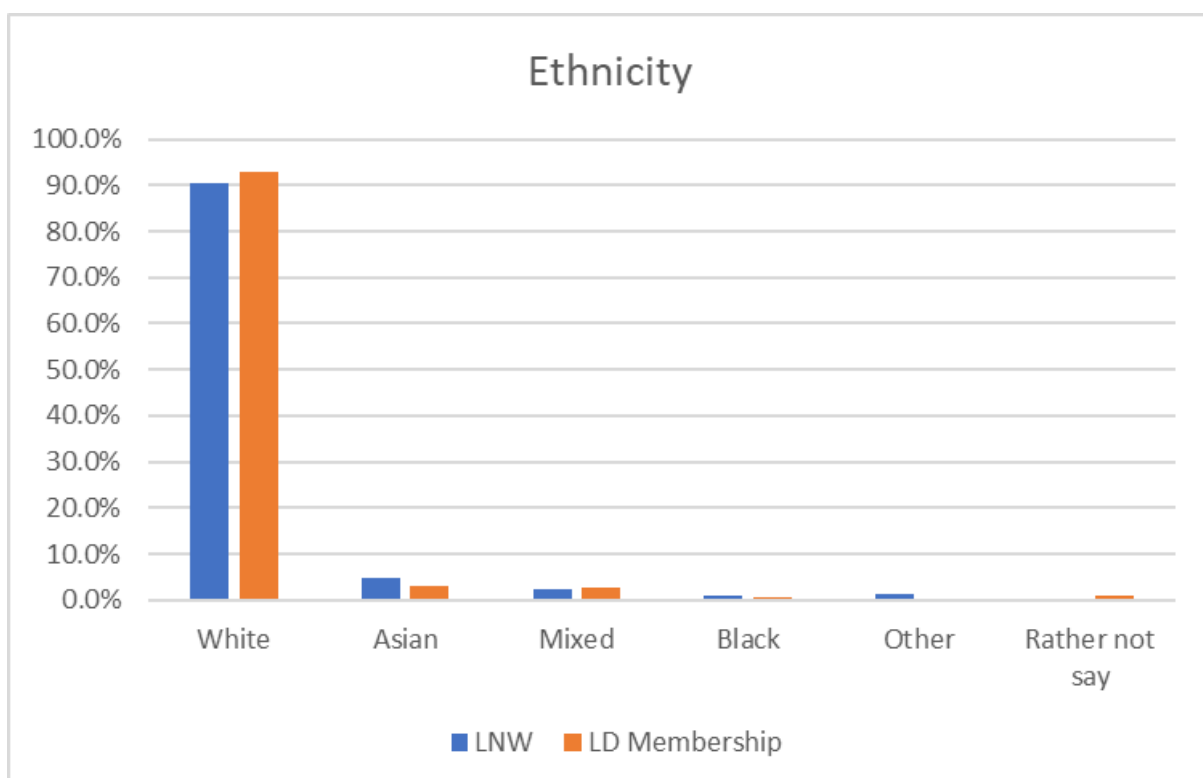
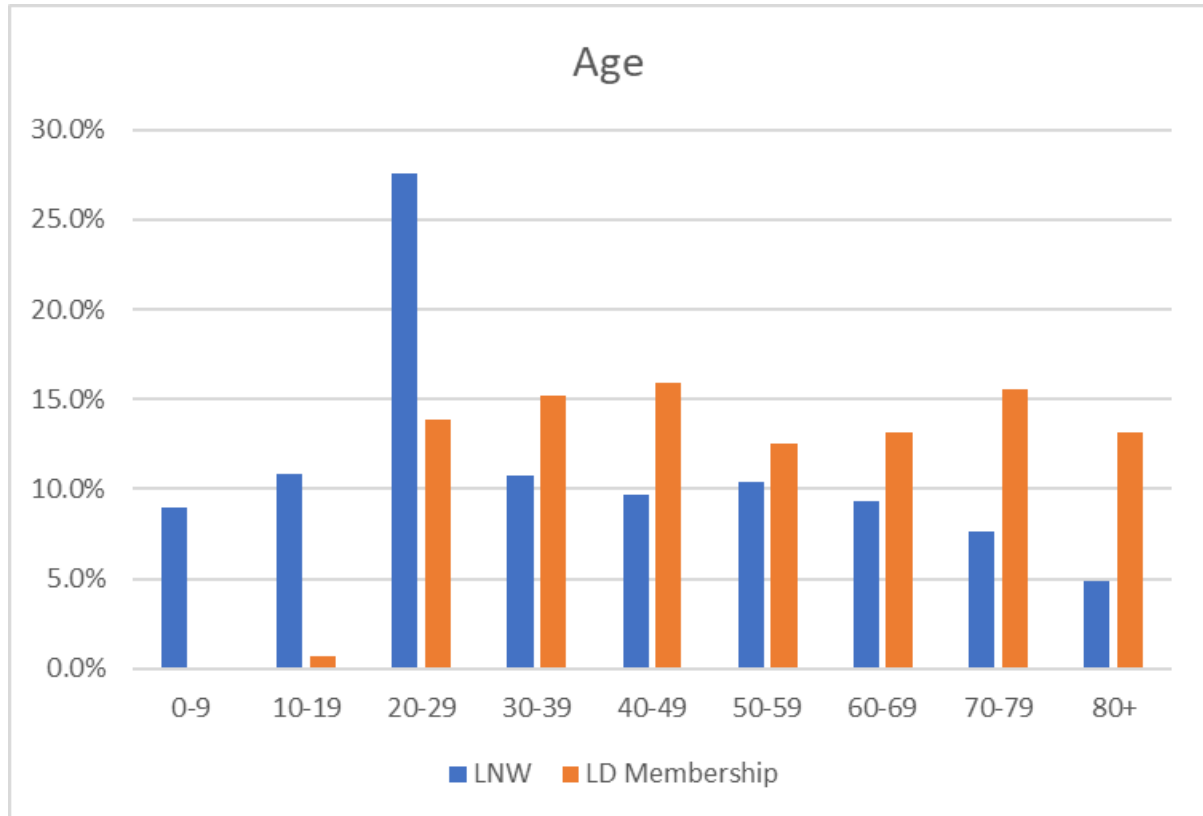
- We plan to arrange visits to meet with representatives of major faith groups to find out what their key issues and concerns are. Potential contacts:
 - Muslim community: we have a cluster of Muslim members in Headingley and are also still in close contact with our former PPC Kamran Hussain
 - Sikh community: Diversity Officer's personal contact
 - Hindu community: Diversity Officer's personal contact
- We are also developing a series of policy discussion events, aimed at finding messages which will resonate with different demographic groups. Obviously, these will be most successful if we invite a diverse range of people to attend and take part in the discussion. We plan to take housing as our first topic.

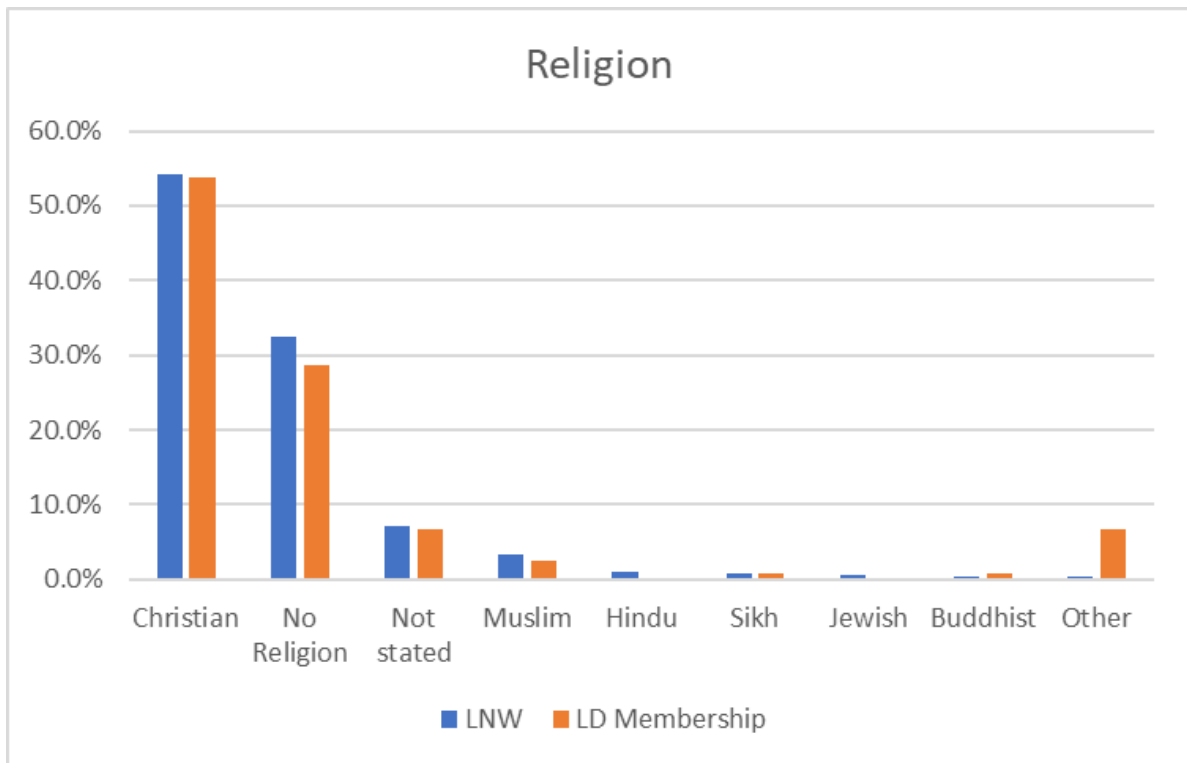
Potential merger into Leeds-wide party

- This has been a point of discussion since the May 2021 elections, with advice and guidance from our regional campaign organiser, Rob Jacques. It is being led by the Leeds council group leader, Stewart Golton, and Leeds North West is participating constructively.
- Part of the goal is to create a stronger city-wide local party structure which is able to engage members whose local parties are currently inactive. This should enable better overall membership recruitment and engagement, including reaching and involving under-represented groups more effectively.
- July 2021: key Leeds activists heard from Andy Sangar and Sue Alston about Sheffield's experience of a similar merger, including its pros and cons.
- September 2021: meeting of Leeds local party chairs to discuss next steps.

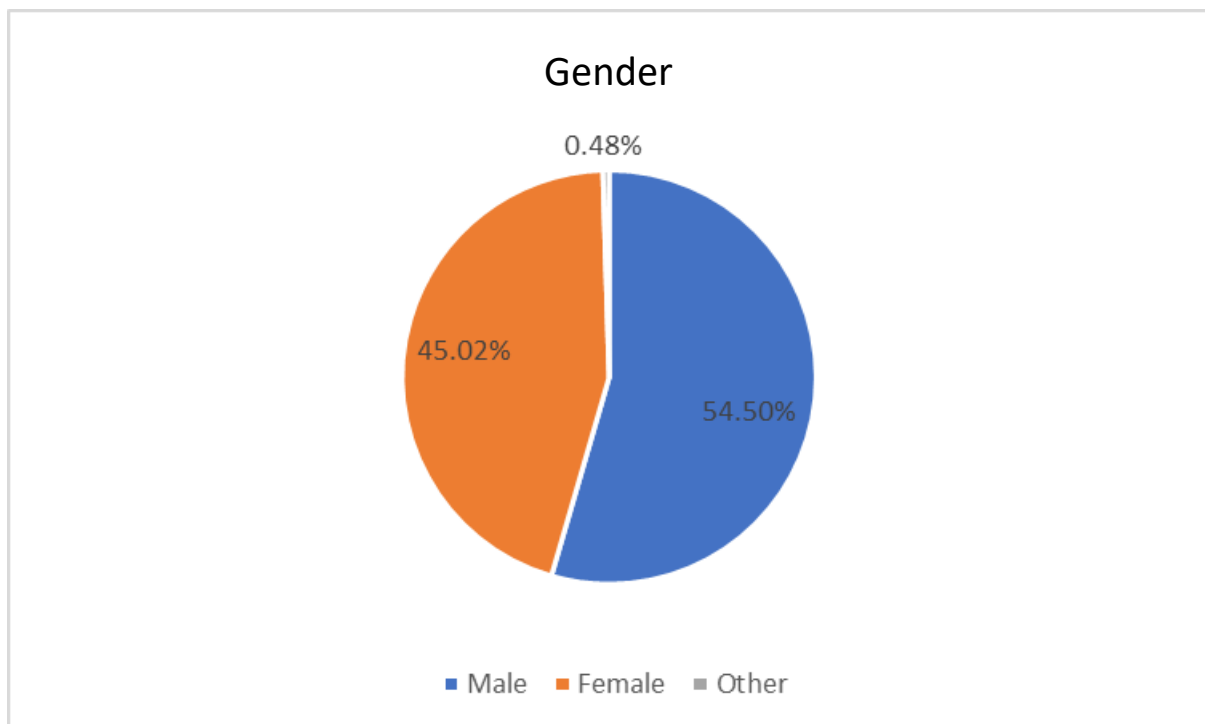
Appendix: graphs showing local membership against local community

The following three graphs show the relationship between the demographics of the local population in Leeds North West (blue) and the membership of the Leeds North West Liberal Democrats local party (orange).

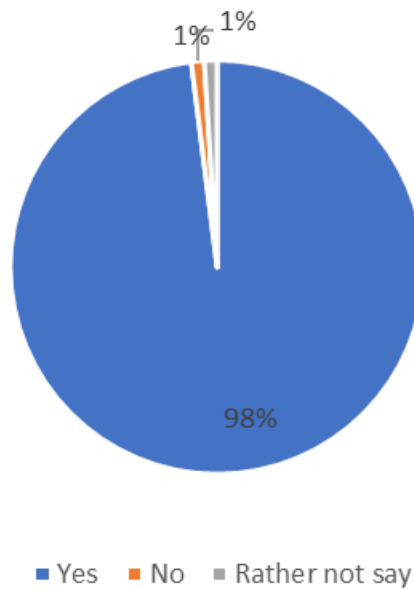




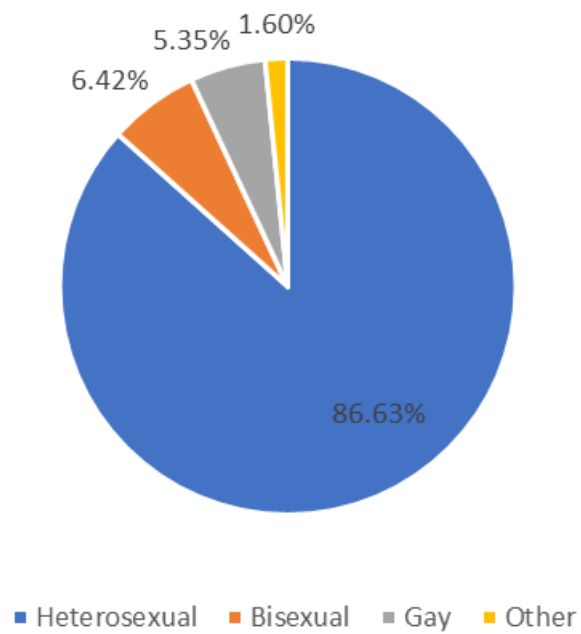
The five pie-charts which follow only show the demographics of Leeds North West local party members, as we do not have specific information about these characteristics for the local constituency population. However, they do at least give us a broad picture of the local party which can be judged against national demographics for these characteristics.



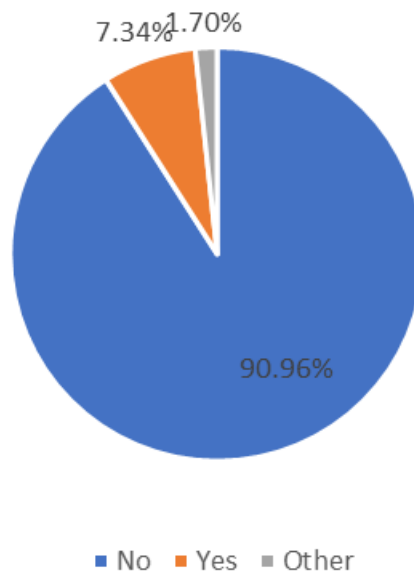
Gender identity as birth:



Sexual orientation



Disability



Socioeconomic activity

