

For immediate release:

Yorkshire's elected Mayors join forces with BookTrust and commit to promoting early years reading to give local children the best start in life

[Photo available](#)

West Yorkshire Mayor Tracy Brabin and **South Yorkshire Mayor Oliver Coppard** have today joined forces with BookTrust, the UK's largest children's reading charity and agreed to promote shared reading support in the early years so local children can enjoy the life-changing benefits of reading.

Over the last year in Yorkshire alone BookTrust has supported 141,475 children aged between 0-13 with books, packs or resources including providing targeted extra support for 31,454 children from low-income backgrounds in their early years. In addition, 180 local public libraries across Yorkshire have taken part in BookTrust Storytime, a free library experience that encourages families with children aged 0-5 to share stories together and make visiting their local library a regular part of family life.*

Using books, stories and rhymes as a basis for playing, talking, singing and exploring in their early years provides the biggest boost to children developmentally, enhancing cognitive, physical, social and emotional growth and development during a period of significant brain growth. Yet research from BookTrust shows that the number of children from low-income backgrounds who are read to daily starts to decline between the ages of two and four meaning millions of children are missing out of the life-changing benefits of reading as a result**.

The commitment from the elected Mayors came during a roundtable event hosted by BookTrust to explore how improving children's reading habits in their early years can help close the disadvantage gap and deliver on strategic priorities for local communities across the region. Joining the discussion held at Leeds Central Library where officials from Leeds City Council, Arts Council England, Sheffield Hallam University and the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL).

BookTrust, which is headquartered in Leeds, works in collaboration with every local authority and thousands of early years and community partners across England, Wales and Northern Ireland to inspire and support families to read and share stories with their children as early as possible so they can enjoy the lifechanging benefits of reading. As well as national programmes that reach every child with books, resources and support, the charity collaborates with local organisations to test and develop more targeted initiatives that can meet the specific and diverse needs of communities living in deprived areas.

Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin said: *"I'm proud to launch this initiative to give the children of West Yorkshire the best start in life through reading, whatever their circumstances. The ability to read is not only an essential skill for work – it provides inspiration and enriches our lives for generations. A region of readers and thinkers will help ensure a stronger, brighter West Yorkshire for all."*

South Yorkshire Mayor Oliver Coppard said *"Getting children to read is as close as we come to a silver bullet if we want to improve the lives of kids and families right across our communities. That's why I spent a significant part of my career making sure kids had access*

to books, and why I'm so determined that now I'm Mayor we'll do everything we can to get children reading in South Yorkshire and beyond."

Diana Gerald, Chief Executive of BookTrust said: *"At BookTrust we recognise the transformative power that reading and sharing stories can have on children's future potential especially those who come from low-income or vulnerable family backgrounds. Whilst we work with families across England, Wales and Northern Ireland we understand the challenges facing different communities vary significantly. Meeting local officials and partners who can work with us to deepen our understanding means we can develop timely and relevant reading initiatives and support that genuinely makes a difference for local families. We are grateful to Tracy Brabin, Oliver Coppard and Leeds City Council for their support and commitment to improve children's access to positive reading experiences in their early years, so together we can support the next generation of readers."*

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

Media Contact

For further information please contact press@booktrust.org.uk

About BookTrust

BookTrust is dedicated to getting children reading because we know that children who read are happier, healthier, more empathetic and more creative. Their early language development is supported and they also do better at school. We are the UK's largest children's reading charity; each year we reach over 2 million children across the UK with books, resources and support to help develop a love of reading, because we know that reading can transform lives. We work with a variety of partners to get children excited about books, rhymes and stories, because if reading is fun, children will want to do it. Our books are delivered via health services, libraries, schools and early years practitioners, and are supported with guidance, advice and resources to encourage the reading habit.
booktrust.org.uk

Photo Details

A photo to accompany the story can be downloaded at the following link:

<https://booktrust.widencollective.com/portals/con0mm8g/YorkshireMayorswithBookTrust>

Photo caption: Yorkshire Mayors meet children's reading charity BookTrust and colleagues.

From left to right: Dr Fufy Demissie, Sheffield Hallam University, Nicholas Baumfield, Arts Council England, Diana Gerald, BookTrust, John Coughlan, BookTrust, Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire, Oliver Coppard, Mayor of South Yorkshire, Councillor Mary Harland, Leeds City Council, Andrea Ellison, Leeds City Council, Adam Tulloch, Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians, Julie Hayward, BookTrust

*** Research Methodology**

BookTrust conducted an online survey of 2,148 parents and carers of children aged 0-7 living in low-income households in England, Wales and Northern Ireland between April and June 2022. The term low-income families indicates those living in relative poverty as defined by Department for Work and Pensions. [family-survey-briefing-1-reading-in-the-early-years-2023.pdf \(booktrust.org.uk\)](https://www.booktrust.org.uk/family-survey-briefing-1-reading-in-the-early-years-2023.pdf)

BookTrust support in Yorkshire

Over the last year BookTrust has provided the following support to children and families in West and South Yorkshire:

| | Number of children aged 0-13 who have received BookTrust books, packs or resources | Number of children aged 1-4 from low-income backgrounds who have been supported with extra shared reading support | Numbers of libraries who have delivered BookTrust Storytime |
|------------------------|--|---|---|
| West Yorkshire | 85,947 | 20,569 | 101 |
| South Yorkshire | 55,528 | 10,885 | 79 |