

All Party Parliamentary Group for **Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire**

**RESPONSES TO THE DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER**

Monday 27th January 2025, 12:30pm – Room U, Portcullis House and via Teams

**ATTENDEES**

**Parliamentarians:** Baroness Harris of Richmond (Liberal Democrats); Harpreet Uppal MP (Labour, Huddersfield); Kevin Hollinrake MP (Conservative, Thirsk and Malton); Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate (Conservative) – Vice Chair; Lord Newby of Rothwell (Liberal Democrat); Lord Wallace of Saltaire (Liberal Democrat) – Vice Chair; Mark Sewards MP (Labour, Leeds West and Morley) – Group Chair; Rachael Maskell MP (Labour, York Central)

**Parliamentary Staff:** Andrew Bocking (Office of Alison Hume MP – Labour, Scarborough and Whitby); Emily King (Parliamentary and Policy Researcher to the Archbishop of York); Hattie Turner (Office of Kevin Hollinrake MP)

**Secretariat:** Ed Jacobs; Mick Swales; Tom Coates

**Speakers:** Dr Andy Mycock (Chief Policy Fellow of the Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network); Cllr Carl Les (Co-Chair of the Yorkshire Leaders Board); David Skaith (Mayor of York and North Yorkshire)

**External Members:** Alison Barker (Chief Executive, North Lincolnshire Council); Bill Walker (Chair, Future Humber); Brandon Jones (Head of External Relations, First Bus); Chris Caulton (Senior Policy and Insight Manager, Doncaster Council); Cllr Philip Jackson (Leader, North East Lincolnshire Council); David Shapland (Head of Marketing and Communications, Health Innovation Yorkshire and Humber); Emma Calverley (Director of Knowledge Exchange, University of Hull); James Farrar (Chief Executive, North Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority); Jenny Holmes (Director of Corporate Delivery, South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority); Laurie Brennan (Head of Policy, Sheffield Council); Monika Antal (Assistant Director, Yorkshire Universities); Paul Townley (Commercial Director for South Yorkshire, First Bus); Sarah Duckering (Executive Director of Research, Knowledge Exchange and Commercialisation Services, University of Hull); Steve Gilley (Director of Infrastructure, University of Bradford)

**RESPONSES TO THE DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER**

**David Skaith – Mayor of York and North Yorkshire**

* Welcomed the Government’s emphasis on Mayoral combined authorities but acknowledged the strain that can come from additional powers and responsibilities.
* The White Paper is exciting for York and North Yorkshire, in particular its role as a trailblazer for a £10 million fund to help economically inactive people get back into work.
* His region is the first combined authority to be set up in a rural area alongside its coastal and city elements. Raised the unique problems that this creates in areas such as transport and internet access. Strategies need to be hyper local to create growth in each region.
* Discussions should be held with Government about how York and North Yorkshire can be used as a template for other combined authorities such as Hull and East Yorkshire and Greater Lincolnshire.
* There is a need for a joined-up approach from all mayors in the region, in particular around transport and the movement of people.
* MPs need to help the Government understand how combined authorities work. Government needs work on a cross-department basis in the same way that combined authorities do.
* Asked the Group to ensure that the Government gives combined authorities the resources necessary to deliver on their priorities, in particular in areas such as growth and transport. Resources should not be a barrier to a combined authority delivering.
* The Group needs to help create an aligned approach across combined authorities, and the Government to help to deliver on its priorities.

**Cllr Carl Les – Co-Chair of the Yorkshire Leaders Board**

* There are opportunities for the region within the White Paper as it does not need any form of local Government reorganisation given every council is already a unitary authority.
* Agreed with the White Paper’s reduction in the number of funding pots in favour of a single integrated settlement. Strongly welcomed the end of the bidding process for funding.
* Accepted that new powers for Mayors would be devolved but stressed that these must come from Whitehall not local authorities.
* All sub-regions have growth plans with many having similar points including skills and digital.
* The Leaders Board is working collaboratively within the region as well , for example stressing its commitment to Northern Powerhouse Rail. Also highlighted the Board’s climate commission, as well as bodies focusing on health, innovation and the tourist economy.
* Yorkshire Leaders Board is working to develop a consensus across councils as well as working outside of tribal politics thanks to having a Labour and a Conservative Co-Chair.

**Dr Andy Mycock – Chief Policy Fellow of the Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network**

* There is a challenge in aligning formal and informal levels of government. There is a need to align existing strategies from local authorities alongside those outlined in local growth plans. There also needs to be wider strategy across the region.
* There is the question of where local authorities fit amongst increased powers for combined authorities. The lack of funding for local authorities may increase tensions between these two levels of government.
* Combined authorities also need to have the resources in order to carry out these new powers as well as implement plans from local authorities.
* Some government departments have not been involved as much as they should in the development of the Devolution White Paper, in particular DEFRA and DWP. Some policies from the previous Levelling Up agenda have also been moved to the peripheries.
* What affect will the shift towards combined authorities have on local councillors. Concerns of a power drain for backbench local councillors who may become delivery agents only.
* There is a role that the APPG can play in utilising their connections with government ministers and civil servants as well as connecting the Yorkshire and Humber voice and projecting it onto various levels of local and national government.
* There is a need to consider the opportunities presented in the White Paper, making sure that the success of devolution is set by local MPs, not the Government. Added that devolution will play a pivotal role in setting future policy agendas.
* Dr Mycock provided a brief research note as a part of the meeting which is available here: <https://y-pern.org.uk/y-pern-presents-a-research-note-to-the-all-party-parliamentary-group-for-yorkshire-and-northern-lincolnshire/>

**Chair – Mark Sewards MP**

* Asked what resources are missing to help ensure that devolution in the region is a success.

**David Skaith**

* Spoke on the need for greater transport resources. York and North Yorkshire was not derived from an existing transport authority like other regions. Additionally, increased resources will be needed to deal with the increased powers and responsibilities given to the combined authority.
* Combined authorities need to understand what the Government is asking of them, and it is important that they have the resources to deliver.

**Baroness Harris of Richmond**

* Asked how the development of town and parish councils will deliver on the objectives of combined authorities as well as raising the progress of transport in York and North Yorkshire.

**Kevin Hollinrake MP**

* Added to the point about transport in North Yorkshire. Asked what progress has been made on Network North and Northern Powerhouse Rail. Wanted to ensure that local councils and combined authorities are aligned in asking for greater transport resources. Also raised the issue of road infrastructure in North Yorkshire and called for the A64 to be dualled.

**David Skaith**

* It is important that relationships are strong between all levels of Local Government. Stressed the importance of combined authorities looking at issues on both a local and region-wide level.
* Raised the issues of implementing a transport strategy similar to those seen elsewhere as York and North Yorkshire is not urbanised and needs unique transport plans. There also needs to be a joined up approach to transport across combined authorities in order to better connect regions.

**Lord Kirkhope**

* Spoke about frustrations around engaging voters due to a lack of opportunities to vote in elections.

**Lord Newby**

* Raised issues around understanding which level of government is responsible for housing strategy across the region and who has the money to spend on this area.

**Lord Wallace**

* Spoke on the Government’s continued emphasis on increasing investment in the South and South East but not the North. Asked Cllr Les to elaborate on the issue of the regionalisation of Government and how the North can have a stronger voice to take to the Government.

**Brandon Jones – First Bus**

* Welcomed the Devolution White Paper and its aims to reform funding and transport powers for combined authorities. Wants to see funding aligned with targets and outcomes to ensure that objectives can be achieved.

**Andy Mycock**

* There is a lot of public support for mayors, but people are still sceptical of the positives of devolution. Combined authorities need to consult better with local communities to give them a voice in the development of their region.
* Voters need to understand the effect of devolution at both a local, regional and national level in order to better engage with elections.

**Cllr Carl Les**

* Supported David Skaith’s call for more resources from government. Added that each £1 spent on administration is £1 that cannot be spent on projects.
* North Yorkshire Council are working to establish town councils in Harrogate and Scarborough, the only areas in the local authority area that are not currently covered.
* Agreed with Kevin Hollinrake’s calls to dual the A64 calling it the single most important intervention to help the coastal community.
* Housing is an issue that still needs determining between local councils and combined authorities. Added that the council still holds the responsibility for the revenue account for housing. The local council also remain the planning authority for North Yorkshire. The council will use its second homes council tax levy to put into housing projects, not supporting the general budget
* The regionalisation of government is an good element of the White Paper and adds that more Whitehall departments and civil servants need to be moved to the North.

**David Skaith**

* A big challenge is the variance in the powers of each local authority and how the public can be made aware of these differences.

**Rachael Maskell MP**

* Spoke on the importance of the leverage that MPs and Peers hold. Added that combined and local authorities need to be aligned with Parliamentarians on their asks to the Government.
* Also raised her calls for greater support for the York Central development alongside a tourism tax and asked for the speakers’ support on it.

**David Skaith**

* Agreed that York Central development had been slow and that speeding this up would allow for growth in the region.

**Cllr Carl Les**

* Also gave his support for York Central adding that the region needs a strong York.

**Mark Sewards**

* Asked how the APPG can best help each speaker in their objectives.

**Andy Mycock**

* There is a need to connect national policymakers with local figures to have a single voice that can speak on the region.

**Cllr Carl Les**

* Continued communication with the Leaders Board is important to unlock barriers in Whitehall

**David Skaith**

* Ensure that all government departments are behind devolution and that combined authorities have the resources necessary to exercise their new powers.

**FOLLOW UP ACTIONS**

* The Group is seized of the need for a strong, unified voice to drive forward the case for economic growth across the region.
* As such, the Group is looking to work alongside external members, to develop policy proposals that can be put to the Government.
* The Group will put out an email to all Parliamentarians and external members in the region inviting ideas for how the region can promote growth.
* These ideas will be translated into a suite of policy proposals that can be raised with the Government.