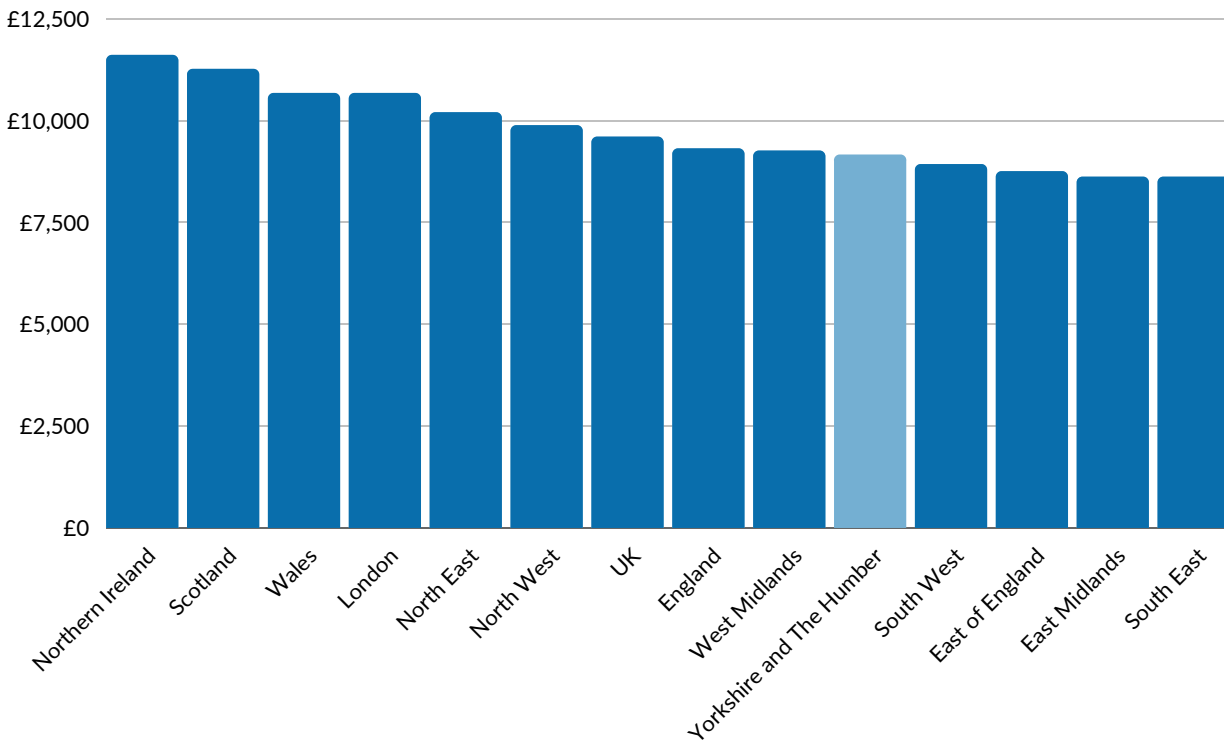


A Stronger Voice for Yorkshire

Yorkshire and The Humber has a population larger than Scotland [1] and a GDP worth more than Wales and Northern Ireland combined[2]. Yet despite this, its share of public spending per head of population, as outlined below, remains well behind London, the North East, the North West, and the UK as a whole.

Public spending per person, by country and region 2018-19[3]



This begs the question, has Yorkshire been under-sold at the national level and, if so, what are the reasons for this and how can it strengthen its position?

When David Cameron, as Prime Minister, declared: “We just thought people in Yorkshire hated everyone else, we didn't realise they hated each other so much”[4] was he, as Helen Pidd, North of England Editor for The Guardian noted[5], speaking to a difficult truth about Yorkshire’s ability, or rather inability, to work in a unified way to ensure it gets the clout it deserves?

It is this disunity which has led to the region being far behind the North West, North East and the West Midlands in obtaining devolution. As deals are finally being agreed in the region, will Metro Mayors be the silver bullet that enables Yorkshire to fulfil its potential as the largest region in the country?

This paper draws heavily on a webinar[6] run jointly by Policy Yorkshire and the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire, kindly sponsored by Homes for the North, which considered how Yorkshire should ensure it has a clear and effective voice in Westminster and Whitehall.

The speakers were:

- **Lord (Bob) Kerlake** – a former Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council who went on to become Permanent Secretary at the Department for Communities and Local Government and Head of the Home Civil Service.
- **Lord (Eric) Pickles** – a former Leader of Bradford Council who served as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in the coalition Government between 2010 and 2015.
- **Cllr Judith Blake** – Leader of Leeds City Council
- **Nigel Wilson** – Chair of Homes for the North

Notes outlining what the speakers said can be found in appendix 1.

Making Devolution Work

After considerable wrangling Yorkshire is now in a position whereby a deal has been struck to provide the powers and funding needed for the Mayor of the Sheffield City Region to function effectively^[7] and a deal for West Yorkshire^[8] paving the way for its first election for a Mayor to take place in May. Discussions remain ongoing to secure deals for North and East Yorkshire.

All of our speakers were clear that devolving power was key to ensuring Yorkshire had a stronger voice as part of efforts to end the region's over-reliance on Whitehall to provide what it needs.

1. Public Support is Vital

It is incumbent on all leaders, both in the civic, business, public and voluntary sectors within the region to more clearly explain the benefits that directly elected mayors will bring for the daily lives of the public, and why they will matter.

The region's Mayors need to be seen as credible figures, who the public trust to implement real change in their area.

Polling undertaken by Populus for the Royal Society for the Arts^[9] and published earlier last year demonstrates the challenges that regional leaders have in persuading the public that the time, effort and resources put in to agreeing devolution deals was worth it. It reports that among those questioned in the Yorkshire and The Humber region:

- Although 27% felt that directly elected mayors should be introduced across England, 31% felt that the ones currently in existence should be abolished with powers returned to local and national government. 30% did not have a view.

- In respect of the structure, whilst 29% said they did not support the concept of a Mayor for their area, 13% supported the ideas of a Mayor with an elected body to scrutinise their decisions (as in London), 24% supported the concept of a Mayor with some limited powers with decisions made jointly with local authorities and 11% preferred the model of a Mayor with a randomly selected citizens jury to scrutinise their decisions.
- 53% agreed that people like them don't have any say about what their local authority does, with just 19% disagreeing with this.
- 25% felt that English towns and small cities lose out on investment to bigger cities because they aren't represented by mayors, with 16% disagreeing with this statement. 31% did not know.
- Just 15% felt that the balance of power between central and local government is about right with 42% disagreeing.
- 39% believe that council leaders would generally be a better voice for their area than an elected Mayor, with just 10% disagreeing with this.

Ahead of the election for the West Yorkshire Mayor in May and potential subsequent ones in other parts of the region, there is a clear need to gain public awareness and consent. If the public are unsure about what difference Mayors will make or even what their roles are, it is hardly likely to generate any enthusiasm and this will be reflected in a low turnout at the election. It was the combination of a lack of understanding combined with the lack of any real power that sunk David Cameron's ambitions to have mayors across England in the referendum to approve them in 10 cities in 2012 with only Bristol approving one.

The combined authorities need to be working intensively now on educating and informing the public and this work should continue once mayors are in place. They need a public mandate to go to the government to ask for effective powers and fiscal responsibilities.

2. Powers and Finances

To ensure that mayors are seen to be credible it is vital that they have strong powers to make and implement policy and raise the money they need.

The Government has pledged to publish a white paper on devolution. This should be far-reaching in scope and should include:

- A more radical approach to the powers available to directly elected mayors based on the principle of subsidiarity. There should be an assumption that powers should be devolved to elected mayors unless there is good reason why they should be retained centrally.

- Agreement that in all those areas where elected mayors have the power to make policy and spend money they should have control over raising the money they need for this. As Lord Pickles noted, it is time to end the days in which local communities and regions spend their time needing to go cap in hand to Whitehall for the resources they need.
- Ensuring that once all four Yorkshire sub-regions have elected mayors they should each have the same powers. The very real danger is that without this it will be difficult to ensure the kind of collaboration that is crucial to the region's success. The Government is supporting in principle the notion that all of the Yorkshire sub-regions should work together through the £200,000 of funding it has made available for collaboration at a Yorkshire-level through the Yorkshire Leaders Board. To then give fewer powers to some mayors will undermine this work.

This will require a complete shift in attitude in central government. For too long the belief has been that Whitehall knows best and the Treasury, as Lord Pickles highlighted, has been reluctant to relinquish control over how money is raised and spent. As Cllr Blake noted, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the weakness of the centre trying to control everything. Empowering mayors and local authorities to do more would enable decisions to be taken more swiftly based on a much better understanding of the needs of their communities.

This needs to be matched by a concerted effort on the part of local authorities, mayors and parliamentarians in the region to show to the Government that the region itself can handle devising and implementing major policy programmes and raise and spend money responsibly. Ensuring central government has confidence in the way devolution operates in the region will be important if the mayors are to secure the powers they want and need.

3. A United Voice

A common theme from all of our contributors was the need for the region to have a united voice with both Lord Kerslake and Lord Pickles warning that division undermines a region's standing and ability to get attention in Westminster and Whitehall. In essence, who speaks for Yorkshire?

In answering this question Yorkshire needs to avoid the temptation to re-open the debate about developing a single, 'One Yorkshire' Mayor. We need to focus on making the four mayors' model work.

That said, there will clearly be many issues where collaboration between the region's mayors will be vital to ensuring Yorkshire can and does succeed in unleashing its potential and addressing the many challenges, and opportunities it now faces.

Although easy to spell out, making the above work will not be easy and will require a shift in mind-set on a number of fronts.

As Cllr Blake pointed out to the webinar, four yearly electoral cycles, especially where they might not be the same in each sub-region, coupled with mayors probably of different political persuasions, will make collaboration difficult. The only answer to this will be a willingness from the very start for all four mayors to recognise that the public are looking for collaboration and a relentless focus on the issues that matter to them.

That is not to say that the mayors should agree on everything. Rather, it means heeding the lesson highlighted by Nigel Wilson from Homes for the North who noted that Greater Manchester's success in large part has been its ability to keep disagreements behind closed doors whilst presenting a united front in public.

Clarity in What We Are Asking For

In his contribution to the webinar, Lord Kerslake noted the importance of Yorkshire having clarity of thought about what it wants and has to contribute both nationally and within the Northern Powerhouse. As he explained, this involves policy proposals being evidence based, entrepreneurial and pro-active.

Policy Yorkshire has been developed specifically to achieve this; to provide new ideas for policy makers across the region and in Westminster to consider.

Importantly as a region, our policy asks need to avoid the temptation to focus solely on the need for central government to provide more money and need to be as specific and non-abstract as possible.

This will inevitably require the region to challenge itself every bit as much as Westminster and Whitehall. Can we, for example, do things and use the resources we already have differently to achieve objectives for the region?

A Confident Yorkshire

It is undoubtedly the case that Yorkshire has been battered and bruised over the past few years. As devolution deals have been agreed and mayors elected across the country, Yorkshire has developed proposals which have gone on only to be rejected by Whitehall.

We have got to a stage whereby we now have a clearer idea of what devolution will look like it is time for everyone in the region from whatever sector or background to have confidence in the region and what it has to offer.

After all, if the region itself does not shout about what it has done and can contribute, who else will?

About Policy Yorkshire

Policy Yorkshire is the region's dedicated think tank. For more information visit www.policyyorkshire.org or email admin@policyyorkshire.org.

Appendix 1: What the Speakers Said

Lord Kerslake (former Head of the Home Civil Service and Permanent Secretary at DCLG)

Harness the Levelling-Up Agenda and Push for Greater Devolution

- Lord Kerslake noted that the need to improve the region's voice in Westminster and Whitehall is not unique to Yorkshire in light of the degree to which power is so centralised in Whitehall compared to other countries. He warned of the UK being one of the most regionally unequal counties as well.
- The Government's 'levelling-up' agenda can play an important role in addressing the power imbalances in the UK, but noted that this will not be achieved without the devolution of both power and funding.

Who is the Voice of Yorkshire?

- He warned that the long period of debate and differences of opinion about what devolution should look like in Yorkshire has weakened its voice. Division, he warned, undermines a region's voice in Westminster and Whitehall.
- It is crucial that the region has a unified voice and identifies who speaks for it.

Yorkshire Will Not Have an Impact on Westminster Only by Talking About Needs

- Although there are huge needs in the region, what makes an impact in Government is innovative, evidence based ideas.

Collaboration, Both Inside and Outside the Region is Crucial

- Collaboration and building alliances with others strengthens a region's voice, such as the work through the Northern Powerhouse.
- Within the region, a unified voice between the public, private and voluntary sectors makes a huge difference in Whitehall and Westminster.

Level of Confidence and Self-Esteem

- The region has faced a bruising time over a long period. Being internally confident about Yorkshire and what it has to offer will strengthen the region.

Responding to Questions

- Was struck in Whitehall how quickly people stop thinking about areas where there is division. There must be a ruthless effort to collaborate across the four mayors in Yorkshire. In Greater Manchester they have learnt to have their arguments behind closed doors.
- Either one of the Mayors could speak for the whole of Yorkshire or each Mayor could be given responsibility for speaking about certain policy issues for the whole of Yorkshire. This would require a maturity of leadership which doesn't always happen in the UK. But the prize would be huge.

- Without power shifting, places like Yorkshire will always be a supplicant to Westminster and Whitehall. He noted that in somewhere such as Spain, regional leaders tend to be important people that visiting dignitaries want to meet alongside national government players.
- Better measures are needed of where money is spent and what it has achieved.
- Improving Yorkshire's position within the Northern Powerhouse needs to be about having the ideas and the arguments about what Yorkshire has to offer. Yorkshire needs to be entrepreneurial and pro-active.
- Moving central government functions to the regions is a positive step, but devolving administrative functions needs to be coupled with policy making functions.

Lord Pickles (Former Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government)

- Neither Whitehall nor Parliament respects weakness. To improve its voice in Westminster Yorkshire needs to become more powerful.
- Devolution deals agreed so far in the region are a good start, but it should not be seen as the end of the journey.
- Elected mayors give the region power and influence.
- England is over-governed with London controlling most things.
- The Treasury is key to unlocking deals and is very reluctant to give up the levers of power.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that where someone is located is not as important as it once was, making it easier for Yorkshire to compete with areas such as the South East.
- Called for reforms to local government finances. Called for a sales tax. With 30% of shopping now online, a tax on such transactions could be redistributed to local authorities. He called for councils to have a greater ability to raise what they spend. National business rates, he noted, essentially fund local government but these are unsustainable in the medium and long term. Expecting councils to go cap in hand to Westminster and Whitehall diminishes its power.
- He called on Yorkshire to grab power, grab influence, grab the finances and work together as a region.
- Nothing causes Government to sit up and think more than unity. Mayors across Yorkshire are therefore going to have to talk, even where they are of a different political persuasion.
- Connectivity is crucial for the region, especially ensuring Yorkshire has good fibre optic Broadband.
- COVID-19 has proved the ability for people, including government departments, to work and operate away from London, remotely and online.

Cllr Judith Blake CBE (Leader, Leeds City Council)

- Yorkshire does not blow its own trumpet enough and look at those who do with scepticism.
- Yorkshire has an enormous amount to celebrate, and capturing that positivity and talking about it is important.

- There has been systemic under investment in Yorkshire, meaning it has been left behind in a number of ways.
- England is the most centralised country in Europe and whilst George Osbourne deserves credit for emphasising the north, his biggest mistake was coming up with a one size fits all model for devolution based on the experience of Greater Manchester. Greater Manchester local authorities have been working together for around 40 years which is not the case in other areas. This has presented difficulties in moving devolution forward in Yorkshire.
- She raised concerns that at a time when many of the public already distrust politicians, and are confused about the split responsibilities between national and local government, Yorkshire is now in a position where there will be four different mayors and mayoral offices with all of the expense to go with it, and yet at the same time the region is wanting to progress collaboration. This presents significant challenges.
- Need to focus more on what those in the community want, and how Mayors can improve the daily lives of people. The vast majority of people do not understand what the Mayor will bring to the table.
- More work is needed to unite politicians at all levels, and linking it with the voice of businesses and communities.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that trying to run programmes from Whitehall and Westminster do not work. COVID-19 programmes need to be run locally with proper resources in place. Westminster and Whitehall need to trust local authorities to deliver for communities.
- Yorkshire needs to grow its confidence and self-esteem to make the case for the region.
- There are signs that Yorkshire is being recognised with the property market flying in some parts of the region and anecdotal evidence suggesting people are wanting to move out of London into Yorkshire. Businesses are also interested moving to the region, along with some central government departments. Closing regional government offices was a huge mistake.
- There needs to be recognition of the diversity of Yorkshire as a region and its people which is an enormous strength.
- As part of negotiations to develop a West Yorkshire devolution deal, money was secured to develop the Yorkshire committee which is work in progress, trying to bring together all key partners to consider priorities for the region. It is important to note that the Mayors will also be part of combined authority cabinets made up of local authority leaders in their areas. However, four yearly electoral cycles can make it difficult to ensure collaboration between Mayors of different political persuasions.
- The forthcoming Devolution White Paper should include a focus on fiscal devolution.
- The Northern Powerhouse is very much Manchester centric with a number of structures, such as Transport for the North, being based there. This creates a sense of imbalance across the north of England.
- Moving central government functions into the regions needs to provide those regions with a real ability to influence decisions. She also raised concerns about Whitehall departments working with a silo mentality.

Nigel Wilson (Chair of Homes for the North)

- Homes for the North recognises that it has a role to play. COVID-19 has demonstrated how important it is for civic organisations, such as housing associations, to work with local authorities and voluntary sectors in collaboration.
- Homes for the North is supporting the levelling up agenda especially the role that the provision of good quality, affordable housing can play as part of this, including regeneration.
- There needs to be a greater distribution of affordable housing funding out of London and the South to other regions in the country. A levelling up of resources needs to be addressed.
- Housing associations are significant investors in the region meaning they are here and invested in communities for the very long term.
- Important to demonstrate what Yorkshire is already doing positively as well as what is needed for the future.
- The Government's Green Book needs to be reformed to ensure more equitable funding for the north.
- There is a need to make the case for long term funding for the region which is difficult given the five yearly electoral cycles.
- Devolution deals need to recognise differences in different regions.
- The challenge is articulating a positive message.
- Lesson from Greater Manchester is that disagreements were kept behind closed doors together with clear structures and responsibilities among local authorities leaders for Greater Manchester-wide issues.
- Important to demonstrate the connectivity needed across the north.

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