

WEST YORKSHIRE MAYORAL MANIFESTO

**A Manifesto Delivering
Sustainable Growth**



Foreword

In May, voters across England will elect 10 metro mayors, the most to date. By May 3 approximately 26 million people, or 44 per cent of the English population will be presided over by a mayor. And in May, another three mayors will be elected for the first time, in the North East¹, York and North Yorkshire, and the East Midlands. This combined group of Metro Mayors (the M12) will then collectively represent more than 50 per cent of England's GDP.

With a strong personal mandate, mayors provide a powerful and influential voice, bringing a strategic regional view to crucial policy decisions on areas such as transport, housing, education, strategic planning and infrastructure. All of which are crucial to business. Across England, we see mayors continue to play a vital role in ensuring a region is an attractive place for inward investment and to do business, both domestically and internationally.

The CBI has been a long standing supporter of devolution and of directly elected mayors, we have seen how they can be strong advocates for their region with the convening power to make things happen. They act as ambassadors for their regions both nationally and internationally, and importantly, provide the governance and accountability Whitehall needs in order to devolve powers and funding.

Regional priorities for devolution

West Yorkshire stands as a vibrant hub of innovation, invention, and creativity. This region, steeped in a rich industrial history, has evolved into a dynamic centre where tradition meets cutting-edge advancements. The confluence of diverse industries, a skilled workforce, and a culture that fosters creativity has propelled West Yorkshire to the forefront of innovation.

Innovation districts, research centres, and collaborative spaces dot the landscape, including the recent announcement for a new Government sponsored Investment Zone, collectively bringing together minds from academia, industry, and the community. This collaborative approach fosters a dynamic ecosystem where ideas are shared, refined, and transformed into tangible advancements. Yet despite these plaudits and accolades, West Yorkshire still lags behind the UK average for productivity; even within the region productivity is not evenly distributed. Progress has clearly been made to address some of the barriers to economic growth and improve productivity, but the region is still in its devolution infancy with more progress to look forward to.

¹ The North East Mayoral Combined Authority will replace the non-mayoral North East Combined Authority and the North of Tyne Combined Authority, whose incumbent mayor is Jamie Driscoll

The CBI is a strong advocate for devolution and will continue to work with the Mayor and WYCA colleagues as the devolution journey continues. Businesses in West Yorkshire value having a mayor that can promote and represent the region on the world stage, as well as listen and work closely with them on key issues. Within this manifesto we set out our priorities for growth which are:

- Drive regional investment from home and overseas
- Future proof the regional labour market to drive inclusive growth
- Regional climate commitments to help the UK deliver net zero
- Drive high-growth technology and innovation
- Delivery resilient public services and fit for purpose infrastructure

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Drive regional investment

Trail blazer settlement

As soon as is practical, the region should work towards securing a tier 4 devolution settlement with Whitehall. This will provide a single funding settlement and empower the region's ambitions, providing greater devolved decision making over investment priorities.

Inward Investment

According to EY's latest UK Attractiveness Survey² the North of England saw double digit growth in FDI across the three Northern regions, "underpinned by resilience in the digital sector and growth across a range of key activities, including manufacturing, sales, research and development, logistics, and headquarters projects." West Yorkshire is being noticed on the world stage and the mayor should build on existing progress and develop a narrative that resonates with international firms.

In his report to government in 2023 Lord Harrington, suggested "**A need for collaboration over competition**"³, citing the importance of regions, and mayoral combined authorities working in partnership to land investment into the UK. The mayor should seek to work with the 12 English regional mayors in the spirit of collaboration that will act as a powerful collective voice.

Cluster development

Build on the emerging med-tech cluster, including the new Investment Zone, to make West Yorkshire internationally recognised as a place to bring ideas, start-up and scale-up within the region. The CBI has set out recommendations to grow economic clusters⁴, we are happy to share our thinking with the mayor and their team.

Business support

The business support landscape is fragmented and confusing so it is pleasing to see that in West Yorkshire these programmes have been brought together into a single hub. However, visibility and awareness of support programmes remains low amongst the business community. The mayor should launch a communications campaign to raise awareness building on the work with intermediaries and regional business representatives to cascade information more efficiently.

Eligibility criteria for business support is also variable across the region, the mayor should review existing programmes and identify gaps in provision, mapped against sectors with high growth potential.

Deliver West Yorkshire mass transit

Development for this long needed project is expected to begin construction in 2028. The mayor must ensure that funding, planning permissions and contracts are in place within their next term of office.

² [Foreign Direct Investment: UK remains second in Europe despite a fall in projects | EY UK](#)

³ p68, [231123_Harrington-Review-Report-FINAL-2_HH_Global_.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

⁴ [CBI Clusters Playbook | CBI](#)

Future proof the regional labour market to drive inclusive growth

The CBI supports the development of the Local Skills Improvement Plan, led by West & North Yorkshire Chamber. This aims to identify current and future skills needs of businesses across the region, providing them with a voice from the demand side. In addition the region has an established network of FE colleges, Higher Education and independent training providers which collectively supply skills and qualifications. The mayor should build on these partnerships and ensure there is ongoing dialogue that is evidence based and ensures there is close collaboration to direct funding from devolved adult skills budgets effectively and efficiently.

The last CBI Education & Skills Survey said that poor careers advice aligned to sectors (34%) and a lack of awareness among learners about different routes to work e.g., apprenticeships (34%) made up the top drivers of skills gaps for most respondents. Following the public consultation into careers and employment support carried out by WYCA in January 24, the mayor should build on the work of the LSIP and deliver region wide, consistent careers advice and guidance, working with employers and their representative bodies to help people access the job opportunities being created.

Many regional firms in sectors such as agriculture and food processing struggle to hire workers, especially seasonal workers. The CBI is calling on government to Reform the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) by turning it into a tripartite body to give social partners a greater voice on labour market policy. This would ensure the advice the government receives on shortages better takes account of the evidence and experience faced by businesses across the economy. We would seek support from a future West Yorkshire elected mayor backed up case studies from within the region.

Regional climate commitments to help the UK deliver net zero

To help drive decarbonisation, the mayor should focus on reducing transport emissions and improving public transport infrastructure. Transport emissions are, alongside domestic household emissions, the biggest contributor to regional carbon emissions⁵. The mayor should continue to seek improvements to public transport, using the funds from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement. In addition, **the mayor should use their national profile to push for greater funding for inter-city urban transport schemes**, as called for in *The Second National Infrastructure Assessment*⁶, to increase public transport capacity.

Given the rural nature of parts of West Yorkshire, personal cars will remain the dominant form of transportation for many. The transition to electric vehicles has not progressed as fast

⁵ [West Yorkshire carbon emission reduction pathways - technical report](#)

⁶ [Second National Infrastructure Assessment - NIC](#)

as anticipated, with EVs making up just 3% of all cars on UK roads⁷. Range anxiety, and poor charging point infrastructure are widely cited as barriers to EV adoption along with the cost of purchase. The mayor should explore options to build a West Yorkshire wide EV infrastructure network, working in partnership with Government, Local Authorities, and the private sector.

The Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission, of which the CBI is a member, have set out a series of recommendations in their 2021 action plan⁸. The mayor should drive forward recommendations to support industry and deliver the infrastructure needed to meet net-zero commitments, a summary of which include:

- Invest in digital infrastructure.
- Adopt a regional, systems-based approach to infrastructure.
- Develop a regional training network.
- Promote climate resilience in business and industry.

Drive high-growth technology and innovation

Maximise the opportunities for West Yorkshire's Life Sciences Investment Zone, build awareness within the UK and abroad to drive inward investment whilst avoiding displacement from elsewhere across the region. Strongly link IZ job opportunities with regional skills plans such as the LSIP and future careers hub.

Delivery of resilient public services and fit for purpose infrastructure

Confidence in our public services is integral to building a thriving regional economy and a central component in delivering sustainable, socially responsible growth.

By striking the right balance between public and private delivery, and fostering a new era of collaboration, the Mayor can ensure that essential enablers of progress and prosperity can best deliver and drive productivity.

A vital lever to drive delivery must be to review the regional planning system, removing the often-burdensome barriers to firms that impact business confidence and prevent investment into regional assets. Committing to a Regional Spatial Plan that offers a long-term strategy will give firms the confidence to collaborate with WYMCA and target investment into those key strategic growth priorities outlined by the Mayor.

⁷ [The UK's electric vehicle strategy needs a rapid recharge says Lords Committee - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

⁸ [Climate Action Plan | Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission \(yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk\)](#)

- **The Mayor should empower the combined authority to develop a strategic framework** to identify opportunities and support pan-regional infrastructure delivery – both physical and digital. This will ensure that local plans for employment land uses are equally as important as those for new housing.
- Implement the recommendations made by Network North and bring together a strategic transport plan to form a single unified West Yorkshire strategy. Integral to increasing investment and productivity, we must have a fully integrated, region-wide public transport system.
- Collaboration across the region and with Westminster to deliver the long promised **West Yorkshire Mass Transit**
- Develop smart ticketing to ensure a London-style transport system and ease of use for multi-modal travelling for commuters across the region. Explore potential to develop this across mayoral boundaries to take greater account of travel to work patterns and help commuters to be less reliant on cars as their main mode of transport.
- In addition, the Mayor should use their considerable convening power to promote investment into East-West connectivity. This will give people within the region better opportunities to access education, skills, and employment across West Yorkshire and beyond.

Conclusion

The CBI and its members are committed the working alongside the Mayor to ensure West Yorkshire builds on existing economic strengths and develops the industries of the future, not just to boost the region's economy but to help tackle some of the global challenges we must collectively solve.

In partnership with other business organisations we will be supporting a mayoral hustings where candidates can share put forward their vision for the future West Yorkshire economy. This will take place on 16 April, at 16.30, more details [here](#).

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To share your views on this topic or ask us a question, contact:

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