

# SOUTH 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 East<sup>1</sup>, 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 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

Since its formation, the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA)<sup>2</sup>, has increasingly cemented its position in both regional and national politics, playing a leading role in driving strategic economic development and driving inward investment.

South Yorkshire is home to many economically significant assets, which play a key role in the UK economy – for example, world-leading universities, and a burgeoning business community centred around healthcare, including a significant healthtech cluster focused on orthopaedics and medical devices. Rooted in its industrial past, the region has a proud economic heritage that has played an integral role in the success and development of the UK's economy. In recent decades, South Yorkshire's economy has transformed, as its focus has shifted towards modern industries, advanced manufacturing for example, enabling the region to continue to play a pivotal role in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy. Recognising the region's distinctive strengths, and building on these, can further drive sustainable growth, increase inward investment and generate jobs.

The mayor must use their mandate to relentlessly promote and pursue an ambitious, long-term regional economic vision that recognises existing strategic assets and emerging economic clusters, inspires inward investment and tourism, and differentiates the South Yorkshire narrative in a competitive domestic and global market.

To better equip South Yorkshire going forward, the mayor should pledge to work with the

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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

2 Previously the Sheffield City Region, between 2018 and September 2021

Government to advance the objective of realising a “trailblazer” devolution settlement, akin to the deals recently agreed with both West Midlands and Greater Manchester Combined Authorities. This would provide greater fiscal autonomy while providing longer-term funding certainty.

Looking ahead to a new era of devolution, the CBI has identified five key policy priorities for a newly elected mayor that will help safeguard the region as a great place to live, work and do business, these include:

- Driving regional investment
- Future-proofing the regional labour market to drive inclusive growth
- Driving regional climate commitments to help the UK deliver net zero
- Driving high-growth technology and innovation
- Delivering resilient public services

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## Drive regional investment

The more embedded MCAs are increasingly taking an active role on the international stage, to promote inward investment by strengthening ties with other countries across the globe<sup>3</sup>, helping to foster growth, boost productivity, and create new jobs. This is true of South Yorkshire, with a dedicated Invest<sup>4</sup> team, led by a Trade and Investment Director, who recently visited the United States to showcase the region as a place to invest.

To further drive regional investment, we recommend:

- The mayor commits to collaborating with the M12 Group of Metro Mayors to amplify their collective voice and attract further investment to the UK.
- In his report to the government in 2023 Lord Harrington, suggested “A need for collaboration over competition”<sup>5</sup> citing the importance of regions, and mayoral combined authorities working in partnership to land investment into the UK. The incoming mayor should seek to work with the 12 English regional mayors in the spirit of collaboration that will act as a powerful collective voice.
- The mayor should commit to improving ties with other countries by facilitating further trade missions, alongside businesses from across the region, to generate investment opportunities.
- The mayor commits to working with all interested parties and stakeholders to pursue the re-opening of Doncaster Sheffield Airport (DSA). Re-opening South Yorkshire’s airport would send a powerful message to prospective investors that the region is open for business. DSA can play a vital part in supporting the region’s economic growth, creating jobs and boosting productivity and connectivity, while also complementing the UK’s first investment zone. The airport is also strategically important to future success of GatewayEast.

## Future proof the regional labour market to drive inclusive growth

The CBI is supportive of the South Yorkshire’s Local Skills Improvement Plans, led by the Doncaster Chamber of Commerce<sup>6</sup>. This LSIP sets out the “skills needs and priorities for the region, as articulated by the employers themselves<sup>7</sup>.” In addition, the LSIP aims to support local economic growth, boost productivity and help realise the talent of all South Yorkshire’s communities and its people. The devolved Adult Education Budget also provides additional funding and resources to help meet the region’s skills needs.

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3 [South Yorkshire’s mayor aims to grow region’s US links | Insider Media](#): South Yorkshire’s mayor aims to grow region’s US links

4 [SY Invest home page - SY Inward Investment \(southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk\)](#)

5 [The Harrington Review of Foreign Direct Investment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#): The Lord Harrington Review of Foreign Direct Investment

6 [Local Skills Improvement Plan - Doncaster Chamber \(doncaster-chamber.co.uk\)](#)

7 [SouthYorkshireLocalSkillsImprovementPlanDigitalSkillsFinal.pdf \(scci.org.uk\)](#): South Yorkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan 2023-2026

To help future proof South Yorkshire's labour market to drive inclusive growth, we recommend:

- The mayor should commit to campaigning to reform the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) by turning it into a tripartite body, with representatives from across the UK, including regional mayors. The Committee's revised remit would include mapping shortages and advising the government on action to address them across the economy. The reformed committee should play a key role in the newly created labour shortages strategy. This would also help ensure the skills needs of each region are taken into consideration when making its recommendations to the government.
- Commits to implementing South Yorkshire's forthcoming Skills Strategy, which aims to support the shift towards a more productive, high-wage economy, by focusing on developing a higher skills profile for the region.
- The mayor should continue to work alongside both educational institutions and businesses to ensure that the local skills system continues to respond to the needs of the business community. This is especially important given the rapidly changing nature of the world of work, brought about by AI and technology – both of which will become increasingly prominent in the way businesses operate.
- The region has an abundance of further and higher education institutions that collectively supply skills and qualifications. The mayor should build on existing partnerships and ensure there is ongoing dialogue, which is evidence-based, and ensures there is close collaboration to direct funding from devolved skills budgets effectively and efficiently. By working collaboratively, education providers can also play a key role in equipping the region with the skills needed to help support the transition to net zero.

## Regional climate commitments to help the UK deliver net zero

Sustainable growth in South Yorkshire can be accelerated through a clear Net Zero investment plan, with competitive incentives to build on the region's strengths. The South Yorkshire Combined Authority's ambition to achieve a net zero economy by 2040<sup>8</sup> is admirable.

South Yorkshire is increasingly becoming a leader in clean energy, developing specialisms in sustainable aviation fuels and heat networks. This is buttressed by the Small Modular Reactor (SMR) Centre of Excellence<sup>9</sup>, which will play a pivotal role in UK's journey to net zero emissions. The SMR also cements the region's reputation as pioneer in state-of-the-art manufacturing.

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8 [Net-Zero - South Yorkshire MCA \(southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk\)](https://southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk): South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority: South Yorkshire Strategic Economic Plan

9 [Nuclear AMRC to support next phase of Rolls-Royce SMR development | News | The University of Sheffield](#)

The Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission<sup>10</sup>, of which the CBI is a member, have set out a series of recommendations in their 2021 action plan. The mayor should drive forward recommendations to support industry and deliver the infrastructure needed to meet net-zero commitments, which include:

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

Rural diversification is an important element in driving inclusive and sustainable growth. One of the barriers to this is access to the National Grid, to deliver new power connections for commercial, residential and industrial use; and enabling renewable energy to feed back into the network. Connectivity to the grid can take years in many cases so the mayor should work with industry, using their convening power to bring parties together and set out a pragmatic long-term plan that prioritises schemes based on their viability and impact.

Ultimately, winning the race to net zero by decarbonising the economy will improve the overall health and well-being of those living and working throughout the region.

## Drive high-growth technology and innovation

Innovation is essential to driving long-term sustainable growth, with firms that innovate shown to grow twice as fast as those that do not. South Yorkshire has a wealth of assets to help drive this pace of growth, including the UK's first investment zone and world-leading higher education institutions that specialise in research and development.

The region also boasts a leading innovation ecosystem, with emerging innovation clusters in both Barnsley and Doncaster, supported by innovation districts, including the Sheffield Olympic Legacy Park, Sheffield Business Park, University of Sheffield Innovation District and the Advanced Manufacturing Park. This ecosystem is bolstered by the presence of world-class businesses, including Rolls Royce, Boeing and McLaren.

To help drive high-growth technology and innovation, we recommend:

- The mayor should build on the development of a supportive innovation eco-system by using their convening power to expand interest from investment and pension funds, along with the British Business Bank, universities, Innovate UK and industry to explore potential to develop new funding streams. This would help address the consistent barrier to high growth start-up and scale-up firms' ability to access to finance; both debt and equity funding can be difficult to obtain<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> [Commissioners | Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission \(yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk\)](https://yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk/): Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission

<sup>11</sup> [SYMCA support for access to finance for business.pdf \(southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk\)](https://southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk/): SYMCA Business Recovery and Growth Board, 15 December 2022, paragraph 1.4

- The mayor should commit to working with the SYMCA Economic Advisory Council<sup>12</sup> to help the region fulfil its potential as a hub for innovation.

## Delivery of resilient public services and fit for purpose infrastructure

Public services are indispensable for safeguarding the well-being of societies, promoting economic stability, and fostering inclusive and resilient communities. Investing in public services while ensuring their resilience is essential for building stronger, more sustainable societies that can withstand and thrive in the face of future challenges.

To help deliver resilient public services and fit for purpose infrastructure, we recommend:

- Empowering Combined Authority Advisory Boards in partnership with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to support pan-regional infrastructure delivery, both physical and digital – ensuring local plans for employment land uses are equally as important as those for new housing.
- Collaborating with other Mayoral Combined Authorities to establish standardised procurement frameworks that prioritise openness, transparency, and inclusivity. These frameworks should enable small and medium (SMEs) and local employers to actively participate in the contract bidding. This could be achieved through working in partnership with the M12 Group of Metro Mayors.
- Developing a genuinely fully integrated, region-wide public transportation system, which is urgently needed, to ensure seamless transit across all modes of transportation, including trams, trains and buses. This will give people the opportunities to access education, skills and training, and more jobs across the wider region.

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<sup>12</sup> [South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority - South Yorkshire MCA \(southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk): Mayors Economic Advisory Council

## Conclusion

The CBI is committed to working alongside the mayor and the South Yorkshire Combined Authority to help ensure sustainable economic growth. We are delighted to be part of the Business Advisory Board; by working alongside other business groups, stakeholders and South Yorkshire's leading businesses, the Board can collectively address the region's challenges.

The CBI contends South Yorkshire can unlock its full potential when politicians and public and private sectors collaborate through shared interests. And CBI members based in the region, and the business community at large stand ready to play their part in this agenda and take forward the priorities within this manifesto.

Ultimately, a thriving and prosperous South Yorkshire will ensure the region can play its part in delivering sustainable economic growth, which will benefit not only the region but the UK as a whole. To help achieve this, the mayor must commit to working in partnership with the M12 Group of Metro Mayors, who collectively using their convening powers, can form an effective alliance for growth.

In partnership with other business organisations, we will be supporting a mayoral hustling where candidates can share and put forward their vision for the future of South Yorkshire's economy. This will take place on Friday, 19 April. For further information and to book your place use: [this link](#)



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

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