**Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network (Y-PERN)**

**Research Note to APPG for Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire Meeting, 27th January 2025**

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The purpose of this short report is to identify key challenges and opportunities the English Devolution White Paper (EDWP) presents for Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire (YNL).

*‘Low fat’ or ‘full fat’ devolution? The jury is still out*

1. The paper sets out a direction of travel to strengthen the role of Mayors and different forms of Combined Authorities (CA’s) (re-named Strategic Authorities) across YNL. UK Government will ‘support’ Mayors in collaborating at pan-regional level. Question remains as to what should or can be achieved at YNL level given asymmetries in powers, capacities, and budgets devolved, and through what means. YNL geography overlaps with, for example, the Northern Powerhouse and Mayoral engagement with the Convention of the North. There will be a key challenge in the aligning of existing and emerging strategies whilst retaining a YNL wide perspective and voice.
2. Whilst the EDWP contains much for Mayors, there are slim pickings for local government and there is scope for tensions to emerge as CA’s take on more responsibilities. CAs not only gain a range of important powers but will be the default provider for new programmes and assume a lead role in public service reform, despite not being a primary delivery body for public services except for transport. Relationships between CA’s and LA’s in the Region have been good and decisions on devolution taken consensually. However, LA’s continue to face severe financial pressure. UK government review of council funding will seek to re-distribute funding between types of council and this will lead, most likely, to further pressure on funding for some. Tensions may emerge between tiers of governance which could be exacerbated by the move to majority voting on CA’s (particularly in those with fewer constituent members). A firm commitment to the crucial place-shaping role of LA’s will be key to good relations.
3. The CAs will carry a heavy burden in coordinating and delivering economic growth. They will become the key strategic planning body, responsible for Spatial Development Plans and Local Growth Plans, as well as more control over strategic housing land allocation, transport, and infrastructure development. Planning and housing allocation in particular have plenty of scope to create community and political tensions. EDWP seeks to make decision-making quicker by allowing for majority voting and Ministerial intervention in the event of delay. This will place a burden on CAs in terms of capacity, staffing and expertise as they will be required to integrate existing plans with those required by the EDWP. A particular challenge will be the oversight and integration of LA local plans and those of a wide range of public services and agencies.
4. Whilst there is a clear commitment to the devolution agenda from the UK government, including the Treasury, the EDWP does not show an ‘across-the-board ‘involvement from central government departments (for example DEFRA and DWP responsibilities are only lightly touched on). This may be a sign of some resistance to devolution in Whitehall. Several resonant policy themes identified in previous ‘Levelling-Up’ objectives are peripheral in EDWP (e.g. inclusive growth/economies, neighbourhood renewal). Further, the welcome commitments to more flexible, single funding allocations for MSA’s, for example, still contain central government control. All these signals suggest there may be scope for ‘reigning back’ by Whitehall or the UK Government of some of the more ambitious intentions of the EDWP as time goes on.
5. EDWP frequently states devolution will give communities a greater say in decisions that affect them. There is however little detail as to how this will be achieved beyond asset transfers, particularly the impact of devolution on democratic renewal or community resilience. Some Las have expressed concerns about the potential ‘power drain’ of backbench local councillors if local government seen increasingly as a ‘delivery agent’ of CAs with little agency for local policy initiatives.

*Opportunities for the Region in the EDWP*

1. YNL will contain five CAs, three already established and two (Hull and East Yorkshire, and Greater Lincolnshire) having their first Mayoral elections in May 2025. Although Yorkshire and Humber have a considerable advantage in having settled governance arrangements, further local government reorganisation in Lincolnshire has been mooted (the formation of two unitary authorities). There are now however **firm government foundations** for YNL collaboration, joint working and lobbying. EDWP highlights the potential for better connecting formal (LA, CA and national) and informal (Yorkshire, YNL, Northern) levels of multi-level policymaking, creating opportunities for ‘joined up policy’ through policy transfer and scaling within and between combined authorities, and across the YNL region. **MPs can play a crucial role in this work through their extensive connections with Ministers and senior departmental civil servants.**
2. EDWP focus on rationalising and integrating multi-level policymaking, service-delivery, outcomes will require collective local and regional voice across Whitehall and UK government.

Established and emergent relationships include the Yorkshire and Humber Councils (including Yorkshire Leaders Board, the White Rose Mayor Agreement and the new Mayoral Council (which the West Yorkshire Mayor chairs). SYMCA and WYCA can also support more recently established CAs in engaging with central government. **Placing MPs and the APPG YNL at the heart of this mission** to amplify this collective voice in Westminster and Whitehall is crucial in both widening and deepening devolution and securing investment to support regional growth.

1. The APPG YNL can help address several areas of ‘concern’ identified in the EDWP. For example, the alignment of government and wider public service boundaries. For the most part, representative, governance and service delivery across the YNL region and nationally suffers from undue fragmentation. The challenge to align policy strategies (see point 3 above) is hampered significantly by this. Whilst this is large ambition which has eluded successive governments over many decades, **the EDWP offers an opportunity to better connect and synchronise the political, policy, service delivery, business, and community ecosystem** to support the delivery of strategic government missions (particularly economic growth).
2. EDWP identifies need for establishing and capturing successful outcomes through ongoing evaluation of devolution. It does not however identify these in detail, though there is a potential that central government (and maybe GMCA and WMCA) will set terms of reference for an outcomes framework. This provides an opportunity to collectively determine (and innovate) local and regional outcomes frameworks, measuring and valuing things differently. **Having YHL MPs involved in shaping place-based success indicators and outcomes** will be key to ensuring future devolution reflects the interests and needs of diverse communities and places across all of the region.
3. The EDWP and wider government agenda gives Mayors considerable leverage in the drive for economic growth, granting them direct powers and strategic oversight in planning, transport and skills. Moreover, the Chancellor has announced that the National Wealth Fund and the Office for Investment will be instructed to work with Mayors, another indication of a desire to deepen the relationship between Whitehall and the combined authorities. However, a national ‘dash for growth’ must connect with existing work Mayors and CA’s in the Region have done to address the fundamental challenges of low skills and productivity, and of creating more inclusive economies. In addition, the role of local government and its financial health will be key to providing the foundational basis and social infrastructure needed to support and maintain sustainable economic growth. **YHL MPs and the APPG for YNL can play a pivotal role** in ensuring that emerging national, regional, and local policy coheres to drive best outcomes for the region.

**Next Steps**

* Y-PERN is conducting a pioneering study with Yorkshire and Humber Councils to explore how an evidence-based approach to widening and deepening devolution across the YNL region. This has involved a review of the international evidence on devolution, and interviews with the Region’s local and combined authority chief executives, political leaders, and senior policy officers. We would like to explore how we can work with the APPG YNL and our MPs to feed their views into this ongoing project.
* The APPG YNL is a key forum for bringing together the Region’s MPs, connecting national policymaking to regional and local scales. Y-PERN would be keen to explore how we can bring the voice and agency of our MPs and the APPG YNL in the developing academic-policy engagement networks across the Region.

**Author’s Note**

The Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network (Y-PERN) is transforming the way academic researchers and knowledge exchange experts in twelve universities work in partnership with local and combined authority policymakers across the region. Based on a Memorandum of Understanding signed between Yorkshire Universities and Yorkshire and Humber Councils, it is enabling sustainable and resilient systems that maximise the flow of research and expertise into public policy. In doing so, Y-PERN is supporting multi-level governance and joined-up policymaking across Yorkshire and the Humber and nationally. For more details about Y-PERN, please contact its Chief Policy Fellow, Dr Andy Mycock (a.j.mycock@leeds.ac.uk) or see our website: <https://y-pern.org.uk>

  