

York and North Yorkshire Devolution Focus Groups 2022

Report – January 2023



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Introduction

Leaders of the York and North Yorkshire councils have secured a proposal for an ambitious devolution deal with Government, which will see a significant transfer of powers and investment from Whitehall to the region. It will give local control of at least £750M of funding to be spent on the things that matter to the people of York and North Yorkshire.

The proposed deal means decisions across key areas, such as, the economy, housing and regeneration, skills and transport will be taken in York and North Yorkshire by people who know and understand the area, bringing benefits for the city, rural and coastal communities, improvements to people's quality of life and driving green economic growth for a carbon negative future.

It will also mean a directly elected Mayor for York and North Yorkshire with the first elections being held in May 2024 and then every four years.

In summary the deal includes

- £540 million (£18 million per year) in Mayoral Investment Funding over 30 years to invest in local priorities;
- Investment of up to £50 million to support and deliver the York Central brownfield regeneration scheme;
- £7 million investment to enable York and North Yorkshire to drive green economic growth towards the ambition to become a carbon negative region;
- Investment of up to £2.65 million to deliver affordable, low carbon homes;
- £13 million for the building of new homes on brownfield land across 2023/24 and 2024/25;
- A commitment to establish a working group to support the development of BioYorkshire;
- New powers from Government to drive regeneration and build more affordable homes;
- New transport powers to improve and integrate the regional transport network.

The Local Enterprise Partnership commissioned Westco, an independent market research agency, to conduct a series of focus groups with residents across York and North Yorkshire to provide insight on the views of residents on the devolution proposals, which would add further understanding to the findings gathered via the consultation survey. The focus groups aimed to gather views from a broad set of residents but also from those who may have been less likely to respond to the consultation survey.

Recruitment approach to the resident focus groups

It was important we recruited a broad mix of residents from across York and North Yorkshire to attend the focus groups. For this project we used a professional recruiter to ensure we met the required sample quotas and diversity specifications. We worked with our professional recruitment partner – Scout. and they fully abide by the MRS Code of Conduct, Data Protection laws and GDPR.

Recruitment screener

We used a recruitment screener to find the correct participants. Westco drafted the recruitment screener (which includes the sample quotas) in consultation with the LEP on the sample they wanted, before being used by Scout with their recruiters.

The purpose of a recruitment screener is for recruiters to use this as a “script” when recruiting potential participants. The recruitment screener includes demographic questions such as; age, gender, ethnicity, social grade, work status and the area in which they live. These questions ensure we meet the specified sample quotas required as they also include instructions on the number of people needed for each quota (so therefore they have the target numbers to meet and not to exceed each quota specified.)

The recruitment screener also includes exclusion questions; these are questions such as making sure a participant has not undertaken research of a similar nature within a specified time frame, or is not a “serial” participant who regularly attends research sessions, or ensuring the participant (or a close relative/family member) does not currently or has recently worked in certain occupations such as market research, journalism, local authority, political activism etc. This is because they are more likely to have higher levels of knowledge and awareness and may influence group discussions.

Before the recruitment screener is used in the field, we confirmed the dates, times and venues for the groups. This is because at the point of recruitment, recruiters ask potential participants if they can make the date, time and venue. If for whatever reason they cannot, they are screened out.

Recruitment

Westco briefed Scout on the screener and recruitment began. For this specific project, the recruitment was undertaken by local recruiters who live in the York and North Yorkshire areas. The recruiters used for this project either live in the specified areas or close by, so were able to travel easily to find participants. They used a mix of on-street recruitment and use of their own panels to recruit from via phone.

As part of the screening process, if the participant “passes” all of the questions and fits the sample quotas, the recruiter collected their contact details (with their permission to comply with GDPR) and telephoned them 1 or 2 days before the focus group was due to take place to double check / remind participants about it.

During the recruitment processes it is also necessary to obtain consent for various aspects of the research project. Westco abides by the MRS code of conduct, which outlines in its first principle the need for informed voluntary consent. For participants to provide informed consent, they need to understand the purpose of the research project, how the data they provide will be used and an idea of what will be involved in participation. We also provided information on how the groups would be recorded (i.e. via Dictaphone, on Zoom etc.). Subsequently, the recruiters explained these aspects of the research project and allowed participants the opportunity to refuse to take part if they did not wish to fulfil any of these requirements.

Research Sample



Nine resident focus groups took place. The summary of the details for each group is below.

Group Number	Date and time	Location	Resident details	Number of residents in attendance
1	Tuesday 22 nd November 6- 7:30pm	Online via Zoom	York residents, aged 18-30	10
2	Tuesday 22 nd November 6- 7:30pm	Broughton Hall, Skipton	Skipton and surrounding area – residents, aged 25- 35	4
3	Tuesday 22 nd November 6- 7:30pm	Ascot House Hotel, Harrogate	Harrogate and surrounding area - residents aged 65+	10
4	Wednesday 23 rd November 6- 7:30pm	Online via Zoom	York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30	9
5	Wednesday 23 rd November 6- 7:30pm	Horse and Vale Hotel, Pickering	Pickering and surrounding, area - residents aged 50+	10
6	Wednesday 23 rd November 6:30- 8pm	York, Tadcaster Holiday Inn	York residents, aged 18+	7
7	Monday 5 th December 6- 7:30pm	Online via Zoom	North Yorkshire residents, aged 18- 30	8
8	Tuesday 6 th December 6- 7:30pm	Online via Zoom	North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+	4
9	Wednesday 7 th December 6- 7:30pm	Online via Zoom	North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+	8

We achieved overall attendance of 70 residents across the 9 groups. An outline of the sample breakdown is provided in appendix A.

Alongside the resident groups, one group was also conducted with landowners on the 8th December from 12:30 to 2pm, with 13 participants. These were recruited via the Country Land and Business Association (CLA).

Objectives of the research and discussion themes

The objectives of the events were to engage and consult with the public on their views of the following;

- To explore what influences quality of life in the local area – York and North Yorkshire
- Explore understanding and views towards devolution as a concept – in favour/opposed/concerns and why

- To explore understanding of governance and Mayoralty - in favour/opposed/concerns and why
- To explore residents' relative priorities in devolution delivery in York and North Yorkshire, and perception and expectations of what devolution can/should deliver

During each session, a slide deck was handed out to participants to allow them all to have the same level of knowledge about devolution and the proposals for this. The full discussion guides and presentation shown to participants can be found in appendices B and D.

Executive Summary

Quality of life

When asked about what contributes to quality of life, the factors participants mentioned can be grouped into three themes 'Opportunities/Growth', 'Accessibility' and 'Wellbeing'.

Broadly, participants discussed a combination of practical needs such as accessible public transport/transport-infrastructure and local health services as well as factors related to culture, leisure and their community/social lives.

These themes often re-emerged throughout discussions, particularly the impact of population 'growth' on the 'accessibility' of services and infrastructure that supports residents' 'wellbeing'. Participants expressed concerns that the development of new housing has led to population growth and subsequent increased pressure of public services and infrastructure.

Priorities

The relationship between 'growth' and resultant pressure on public services/infrastructure played out in discussions of residents' priorities. Some discussed the need for more genuinely affordable housing, particularly those in more urban areas.

Meanwhile, some discussed the need to expand public services and infrastructure to accommodate growth as a result of new build houses. In particular there was an emphasis on an improved road network, more frequent and reliable public transport, the expansion of local health services (GPs, hospitals and dentists) and the expansion of schools.

While not exclusive to rural areas, the pressure on existing local amenities was keenly felt by these residents.

Finally, participants often highlighted the need for education and training to prepare young people and adults for jobs available locally.

Devolution deal

Residents were generally unfamiliar with the meaning of devolution and terminology, and how new governance would change the day to day running of local government. They also felt the devolution proposals lacked detail and were unclear about whether additional funding would make an impact on already stretched services and if proposals would require an increase in council tax. Landowners were cautiously optimistic about the devolution deal and believed the structure of a MCA would ensure it is not urban dominated but shared residents concerns about the level of funding proposed.

Understandably, new funding streams to support new affordable homes attracted much discussion. Younger and urban residents were positive about new money for new housing, though there were questions as to whether there would be enough money, whether housing would be genuinely affordable and how the MCA could address the supply of housing.

More broadly there were also concerns that even more new houses would exacerbate the issues caused by recent new build housing. Landowners believed new housing developments needed to have more of a rural focus as

current planning frameworks and approvals were believed to be biased in favour of urban developments.

Participants also welcomed new funding streams for a variety of projects but are concerned that this may come at the cost of funding that would have otherwise gone to/or been made available to existing local authorities. Furthermore, some expressed concerns that this would lead to a rise in Council Tax.

Residents welcomed the inclusion of transport in the proposals and wanted the focus to be on improving bus networks and rail connections across the region. Landowners wanted more focus on the road networks to enable ease of movement across the region more generally.

Residents wanted additional detail about skills and employment proposals and believed that more emphasis should be placed on vocational training and apprenticeships as well as good local employment opportunities so that young people who did not want to attend university could afford to continue to live in the region.

As employers in the region, landowners especially wanted to provide young people with better access to education, training and employment.

Residents believed it would be difficult for the region to achieve its carbon negative aims given existing global challenges and plans for growth in the region. However, landowners welcomed the plans for this issue and wanted to be involved in its delivery as they felt they had much to offer in terms of knowledge and expertise.

Mayoral Combined Authority

Participants understanding of the current organisation, funding and powers of local authorities in York and North Yorkshire varied. Typically knowledge existing local authorities was focussed on the way participants have interacted with local authorities in the past (i.e. by accessing public services). A limited knowledge can account for some of the criticisms levelled at local authorities for failing to accommodate growth – for instance, assuming that councils can ensure increases to the capacity of local health services to accommodate new homes.

Few participants mentioned the upcoming re-organisation and formation of a unitary authority in North Yorkshire and often were not familiar with the term Unitary Authority.

Naturally there were conversations about how an MCA could handle the differences between rural North Yorkshire and urban York City. This links in with themes around growth and pressure on local amenities. There is a sense that even old local authorities failed to accommodate growth and they were more locally based – and so how can an MCA focused on a wider region do the same.

As such some participants were pleased with proposals to include councillors from each of the local authorities in proposals. However, there were questions about how representatives on the board would be selected – for instance if a mayor were to be able to select them, then this would have an implication on the ability of the board to hold the mayor to account.

Residents wanted more information on how a new MCA structure could benefit in terms of tangible policies and referenced that West Yorkshire MCA policy had been able to subsidise transport costs.

There was a general theme that residents were concerned that certain areas would benefit from more funding allocation than others based a concern that the five voting members, including the Mayor, may allocate funding to the parts of York and North Yorkshire that they personally are from..

Despite these concerns there was a view that having a mayor would be beneficial because it would mean that there is a single visible elected official that will be easier to hold to account. This would lead to great transparency and could ensure that resources are distributed fairly between the communities.

However, it was difficult for residents to believe that a governance structure of five voting members could ensure fair decision making. They also questioned how any conflicts between board members would be managed and resolved.

Although there was confusion about the role and functions of a Mayor, overall the role would help to raise the profile of the region and attract inward investment. The role sounded demanding and therefore the person appointed should have good knowledge of the region, be a good communicator and be involved with the local communities otherwise they could struggle with addressing the needs of the region and delivering on their mandate.

Landowners' views of the governance structure generally echoed those of residents. They believed a MCA could deliver cost savings and were more positive about the inclusion of an elected Mayor than residents given their knowledge of the successes of Mayors in other regions.

Quality of life

As part of the focus group discussions, residents were asked to define what quality of life means to them and what factors or issues they felt had the biggest impact on it. By doing this, we sought to understand what was important to residents in public service delivery and how this interacts with their quality of life in York and North Yorkshire.

This section of the report details findings across the nine resident focus groups on how residents defined quality of life, and their relative priorities in terms of what was most important to their quality of life.

Factors that impact quality of life

Some of the key factors mentioned by residents were: proximity to family and friends, access to scenic countryside, access to culture, ease of travel across the region and accessibility of public services, with services that fall under the jurisdiction of other public services operating in the area – such as the NHS and Police often mentioned.

Often the key factors related to much wider and more complex overarching themes, which were often interlinked. This section of the report provides commentary on the following themes and the factors within them:



Accessibility

The theme of accessibility was discussed by many residents across all of the groups and tended to focus on lack of accessibility to services or negative aspects of factors such as:

Highways/roads

The quality and accessibility of highways and roads were discussed by many, and linked to other themes such as growth and opportunities.

Many residents discussed their experiences of using the roads with factors such as the poor quality of the roads and the high volumes of traffic and congestion in local areas affecting quality of life.

Speaking of development at Castle Howard:

The roads are not highways, they are simply byways. Already congested, the A64, is frequently blocked which sends all the traffic through the village, it is of great concern.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

Volume of traffic, can't plan to go anywhere in the summer. It's gridlock pretty much every day. It's pretty much all year round now.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

Where I live in York there are a lot of HMOs and they bring a lot of traffic to the streets

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

For residents in or around York, discussions around congestion focused particularly on the City's ring roads. In more rural and suburban communities residents argued that there is a need to develop the road networks to support new housing developments and estates that have emerged in these areas. (discussed further in development and growth section.)

Many residents perceived that the volume of traffic and congestion was caused by a lack of planning of the road infrastructure.

They made promises about creating a A64 dual carriageway all the way through, but that never seems to finish so it would be interesting to know if that's going to happen as part of this devolution.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

I'm hoping the transport can be sorted out, it's pretty much one lane all round and there's a lot on levelling up especially around the north and it takes a lot of time to get to certain places.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

For people who have to commute to work by car, York is a horrendous place to negotiate, you just need York races to be on and the whole city is at a standstill.

Group 9, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

I know from when I lived in an estate when they build new houses everything else just becomes busier and touches upon everything else, traffic, they don't facilitate.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

A related issue was the perceived high cost of car parking in York. Some residents acknowledged that parking costs had risen probably because the

council was trying to cut congestion in the city, but these residents felt that the cost of travelling to the city by public transport was not cost effective either.



Public Transport

Discussions about highways and roads were usually accompanied by discussions about public transport in the region. Generally, residents across the region felt that public transport is lacking and that it is difficult to travel around the region and also out of the region to other major destinations via public transport. Residents also noted the cost and infrequency of different forms of public transport, particularly important for people who cannot drive and who rely on public transport. In more rural and suburban communities difficulties accessing public transport compounded the accessibility of public services such as GP surgeries and dentists.

Because I don't drive, [I need] good transport routes that run on time.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

The trains up north are so much worse than those down in south, and trying to get to places for instance, York, Manchester takes a lot longer than driving.

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Buses

Some felt that bus services are not frequent enough in more rural areas, and some mentioned issues of reliability, impacting accessibility, particularly when a route only runs once an hour. Other residents also mentioned the bus fares, particularly that the cost of fares could discourage people from using the service and that this was hindering residents' ability to reach jobs or use towns and high streets.

I am lucky I can walk into York but it's £20 for 4 people just to go into town on a bus, that's an expensive trip so that's why the high street is dying and if you haven't got a car some of the shopping centres are out of your reach as well.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

My granddaughter is doing an apprenticeship and she gets nothing, I pay her bus fare, £90 a month, she can't afford that.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

A bus drove right past my 13 year old son because there wasn't enough room on the bus and that caused me some distress, he now has to get two buses, and get up an hour earlier to get a local bus into town and then one from town to his school.

Group 8, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

Rail

Issues with buses were perceived to be compounded by poor rail infrastructure, particularly for residents in Pickering and Skipton where residents discussed how they often cannot take a more direct route to their desired destinations, and

need to travel to nearby cities and take a connecting train, making trains more expensive and a more time-consuming method of transport.

I drive but if I managed to get the train, I feel like you always have to go to Leeds to get to anywhere.

Group 2, Skipton residents, aged 25-35

I went down to London a couple of weeks ago and it's just great what the underground like there is and train services here are very poor, they take 20-30mins or they don't even come, whereas in London they come every 2mins.

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Health Services

The majority of residents discussed the accessibility of health services in the region, noting a lack of NHS places at local dentists, difficulties getting GP appointments and long waiting times for ambulances and at A&Es across the region.

Some attributed this to a lack of funding for local health services. Outside of York, residents also argued that population growth from new housing developments had put a lot of pressure on the existing health care infrastructure such that it currently cannot meet the needs of the local population.

No point building all these new houses, but what about the dentist? I know we have a hospital in Whitby which is brilliant, but there's not any dentists and there's other things you need to prioritise over houses.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

There are so many new homes being built around Harrogate and they're not really affordable for the average person who works ... it's affecting the doctors; they are over-subscribed.

Group 9, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

We keep talking about housing, but do we have the infrastructure like doctors for instance and dentists, I know that's generally a UK issue, but it won't help at all.

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

You could have multiple deaths between trying to reach Scarborough hospital, so it's important to have a regional hospital for those who work in manual jobs.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

There's a complete lack of ambulance services...they said I won't get any ambulance for a while, so when you need an ambulance to come to Whitby you are going to have to wait because it has to come from Scarborough and in a medical emergency that's appalling.

Group 8, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

Local amenities

Residents discussed the importance of local amenities as contributors to a good quality of life and physical and mental wellbeing. Here, there were differences by life stage, with families and older residents feeling more positive about the availability of local amenities. Those living in York appreciated the city's history and relaxed atmosphere and felt that living in and around the city provided many

things for families to do and that other attractions such as the coast were not far away. Pickering residents were proud that they have everything they needed nearby. However, some younger residents felt their needs were not as well met, especially local cultural amenities.

York's got a great city centre, that certainly helps, weekends out, walking round, got history too

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

Pickering has everything you want in a local area, everything is nearby.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

For me it's access to good quality amenities locally and culture, so for me I'm a big live music fan and one of the things that is frustrating is having to travel further afield to see good quality acts and not having local culture on your doorstep.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

Opportunities

The theme of opportunities was discussed by many residents, with some factors affecting quality of life because of a lack of opportunities. Factors impacting opportunities included:

Housing

Many cited housing as a key factor impacting their quality of life and differences in views by life stage and location emerged. Those living in or around York were concerned about the cost of housing, either being able to purchase a property or the cost of rent. They felt that the cost of housing has increased and is too high and that they are likely to get less value for money than elsewhere in the county. Generally older residents in Harrogate had moved there to take advantage of the perceived better quality of life the town afforded them and recognised it was more expensive than other towns in the region but some younger residents who had moved there for work had found it difficult to find affordable housing.

Linked to this, residents in other areas lacked confidence that promised affordable housing would actually be affordable for them.

Regarding the housing, it's very much needed in York, particularly the affordable housing... if it's not actually affordable for York prices, who would then be buying them up, is it then just for people to create more Airbnb's, will it actually be for people to live in?

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

We came from Leeds, and we found it was cheaper here [in York]... personally for me if someone's going to come in and enforce all this affordable housing, is that going to devalue my house?

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

I'm a primary schoolteacher and I'm only able to afford to live in Harrogate because we have taken over my Grandad's house, and one of my colleagues is renting here and it's just taking out so much of her salary every month.

Group 9, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

We live in a bubble in Harrogate don't we.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Residents also discussed the need for new housing in terms of population growth and the impact on local infrastructure. As discussed in the accessibility theme, those outside of York often expressed concerns that further new developments would lead to more population growth in their local areas, and add further pressure on local services.

Building houses in small areas, whilst we need them because the population is growing at the same time the more you do that there is more pressure on these services and people and it's not always feasible for them to meet them

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

I don't see the point of giving permission for lots of houses when there's no jobs. There's no incentive for the council to say no, as they get £2000 council tax a year for taking the bins

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

I know that there are 4000 new homes that have been built in Harrogate but nothing done about new GPs or new schools

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Young people

Some discussed the need for opportunities and amenities for children and young people. Several residents, often parents, noted that their children's mental health had declined during the pandemic and that there needs to be more amenities aimed at young people to facilitate improvements. There was also discussion about the need to support younger adults with post-16 education – some noting that there are few opportunities for young people in local areas.

I don't think the Hydro in Harrogate is scheduled to open until mid-next year and it's been closed for over 18 months, they are renovating it to make it safer but it has an impact on my kids leisure and social lives

Group 8, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

I feel as a York resident that we don't get anything, if we were in Leeds or Harrogate we would get discounts, like at the ice skating, there's nothing particularly for young families in York, we don't have any ice skating, the leisure pool went

Group 9, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

More activities for kids, even with mental health. There used to be a lot of children/parent groups but due to Covid and the lack of funding there isn't a lot out there anymore

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Children who go onto further education get something, those who go into apprenticeships get nothing. My daughter I pay for her bus fares she can't afford it, where's the services these young families need?

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

My son couldn't get a job here and he's moved to Manchester now

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

Employment

Some discussed the importance of job opportunities in York and North Yorkshire as a key component of quality of life. Discussions around jobs often focused on young people and the need to provide good jobs in local areas to ensure that those leaving school/college could stay in the local area. Residents also highlighted how jobs need to be accessible as well.

Half of the independent shops in York have closed because the rents are too high.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

I am concerned about those in really rural areas, no access to transport and broadband and they can't get it, school transport costs, transporting, jobs for young people, jobs being retained by young people, hospital- need to try and keep it open.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

Education for 16+ and making it fairer, and access courses that essentially lead to good paying jobs

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Wellbeing

Factors related to wellbeing often came up first in discussions about quality of life, covering themes such as the importance of having good health, both physical and mental, having a good work/life balance and having good relationships with friends and family. The region was often described as having natural beauty with scenic countryside close by, and this was also a contributor to wellbeing, and a key reason why residents liked living in the region.

Mental and physical health

Many residents discussed a general decline in their own mental health or of their friends and family. Much of this was attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the isolation during lockdown. However, other factors were currently felt to be impacting the mental health of residents, such as the cost of living and pressures from work.

Physical health was also discussed as an important factor impacting quality of life, often exacerbated by difficulty accessing health services, as covered earlier in this section of the report.

'Mental and physical and balance of work and home life and happiness'

Group 2, Skipton residents, aged 25-35

'It's not just financial, but wellbeing too, emotions and how you feel. If you don't think properly, you're not going to work properly. Combination of financial and mental wellbeing'

Group 2, Skipton residents, aged 25-35

Work/life balance & family/friends

Some discussed the need for a good work life balance. Those who felt that this was important described wanting to have enough time to socialise with friends or family outside of work hours, and having the freedom to choose how to prioritise work and family life. This topic also links with access to amenities in terms of having time to participate in culture such as music concerts, theatre performances etc.

'Good work life balance, making sure you have time for friends and family, working enough to sustain a household'

Group 2, Skipton residents, aged 25-35

'A good work life balance... well since having kids, I had been a teacher, but I decided to quit teaching so I could stay at home and look after the kids... I just like looking after the kids'

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

"For me it's about being able to spend lots of time with my friends and make memories, so having things around locally that I can do and not do the same thing again and again is quite nice.'

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

It also relates to relationships, friends are important to your life,

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Countryside

Residents emphasised the beauty of the York and North Yorks region as a positive impact on wellbeing. Those who had lived in other parts of the country appreciated the fresh air and relaxed feel of living in the region, and that it was easy to travel to the countryside or the coast. Some residents who had lived outside the region had decided to return when they retired, especially those living in Harrogate.

Returned to Yorkshire as it's better to live in the countryside than the city

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

Loved everything about it [Yorkshire Countryside]

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

My brother was visiting from Glasgow and he remarked how nice it was here. I feel safe here, and I like the access to the countryside, and I couldn't think of another place where I'd rather be.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Cost of living

Many residents discussed the impact of the cost of living on heating and food having a negative impact on people's lives.

It's what you can afford, can you afford to pay bills and put food on the table, and that influences your health

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Culture

Linked with work life balance, several residents and especially those aged 18-35 discussed the need to have access to culture/entertainment in their local area and that this was lacking in the region. They discussed wanting to spend time with friends on 'nights out,' at music concerts and on the high street.

York's got a great city centre, that certainly helps, weekends out, walking round, got history too

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

For me it's access to good quality amenities locally and culture, so for me I'm a big live music fan and one of the things that is frustrating is having to travel further afield to see good quality acts and not having local culture on your doorstep'

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

Personal safety

Most residents said they felt safe living in the region. One exception to this was Harrogate where a local drugs problem was noted. In York, bicycle theft in the city centre was cited as a problem.

For a city York is quite safe, you can walk from one side of the city to the other, you'd let the kids go there on their own for a walk around, it's more relaxed than other cities like Leeds, if you go for a night out there, everything is so far apart, and it feels too crowded

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

I've got a 17 year old son and I don't like him cycling into town because of the thefts, it doesn't matter what lock you've got, they will cut through it.

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

People tend to gloss over the underbelly of living in Harrogate, we have a huge drugs problem, I was personally assaulted on The Stray by someone who was off his head on drugs. It went to court but he didn't go to prison because of his mental health condition.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Devolution Proposals

The second section of the group discussions concentrated on devolution and the proposals around this. At the start of this section, a set of slides detailing what devolution is and the proposals for York and North Yorkshire were handed out to participants and the facilitator read through the slides with participants. A copy of these slides can be found in appendix C.

Views on Devolution

Understanding

Across most groups there was confusion over what devolution means and how it will be different to the current make up of local government and local services. The terminology was not familiar to many which added to their confusion (e.g. mayoral funding stream, combined authority). Some residents understand the current structure of local government in York and North Yorkshire and found it difficult to compare the current model with the devolution deal.

I feel like you know more about what they don't do [in reference to local councils] and I think that's because on a day to day basis oh they haven't done this

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

It's hard to decipher the benefits at the moment and add to that you don't know who will be running the thing

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

There was also confusion and sometimes scepticism over if and how the new governance arrangements will change things for them day to day.

I don't understand why North Yorkshire County Council can't have all these things. What will be different?

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

Many wanted to know more about how the changes will impact them and how things will work in the new structure of local government. While the devolution deal is about the transfer of powers and funding, residents often wanted information about how this would be used. Some found it challenging to assess whether a Combined Mayoral Authority and a Mayor would be a benefit without knowing the steps that a newly elected Mayor would take.

I think we're all in agreement, that between all of us, we want to know a little bit more about it.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

In general, moving decisions closer to people has got to be better but it's all in the detail isn't it, and this isn't detailed enough

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Local decision making

Overall, many residents were positive about the transfer of more decision-making powers to the region. Those in favour of devolution argued that decision making will improve because the decision makers will be based in York and North Yorkshire and will see the opportunities and challenges the region presents.

Decisions about local area by people who are local. That is the positive of this.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

It sounds amazing, they are giving the region money to improve the region in the way they want.

Group 9, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

“Andy Burnham in Greater Manchester has been doing a lot of work on the transport network... Mayor elected by the people who would be much more involved with the community”

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

However, this position was qualified with some arguing that the area covered by the region is so large and diverse that there is a risk that the needs of different and smaller towns/villages may be missed in favour of cities and larger conurbations.

If you have one mayor for both, the focus will be on York, they're going to overlook the smaller areas that's always how it happened in the past.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

In general, moving decisions closer to people has got to be better but it's all in the detail isn't it, and this isn't detailed enough.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Trust in delivery

While many residents were supportive of the principles that underline the devolution deal, such as local decision making, some lacked confidence in the delivery. Reservations were often based on their experiences and perception of existing local government, and some residents did not think that changes to the local government structure will lead to real change.

I lived in Reading for 20 years and they did this. They went from unitary to this, back to unitary again. And they spent money on doing it.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

If you take it at face value if local decisions are taken by local people, then that can only be a good thing, but it is about the execution because you do see how things are at the moment and so it's always gonna leave a sour taste in your mouth.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

Some were concerned that despite new funding streams as part of the deal, the amount of funding offered will not be sufficient. In part this was because of a perception that local government and services were already stretched and additional funding is needed to simply stabilise these services.

How will the councils meet demand, as they can't meet current demand in housing – i.e. maintenance of housing, they already can't do the work needed. Isn't giving them more responsibility going to make that worse?

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

Residents also suspected that the setup/running costs and the costs of specific projects may also cost more than the funding streams on offer.

How are you going to do that? Is this money getting invested so you can hire more people to run these different areas? I feel that's a missing kind of piece.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

I work in construction and £13m to build new homes would only get you 80-100 new homes.

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

It all sounds a bit vague, and 'jam tomorrow'.

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

Some residents had heard stories about wasteful spending by local authorities in the region.

I lived in Reading for 20 years and they did this. They went from unitary to this, back to unitary again. And they spent on that money on doing it. That money wasn't spent, that money was wasted.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

If it ain't broke, you don't try and fix it. You should stay with the existing system.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

I'm very disappointed in local government, one example being the departure of the Chief Executive of York Council who was kept on full pay for 18 months and given a £400,000 payoff.

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

Funding and Finance

Many residents questioned where the money for the new funding streams would come from. Several expressed concerns that key funding figures in the devolution deal, such as the £540 million in Mayoral Investment Fund would come from increased council tax.

Some expressed concerns that funding for new local authorities could come at the cost of money earmarked for lower tier local authorities such as town councils, (which have been replaced by North Yorkshire County Council). Residents also wanted more information about how the funding would be apportioned to projects vs. administrative costs.

How much of the £18m goes on running this new combined authority rather than on the proposals?

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

Others thought that some of the funding streams offered were not sufficient and are unlikely to have a positive impact.

It's peanuts really so in terms of additional investment, it's potentially quite confusing, and £18m in 30 years' time will be worth nothing, this document is just a sales pitch.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

80 million across that many years, is that realistic to accommodate young people like us in terms of affordable housing, and how is it going to be designated?

Group 2, Skipton residents, aged 25-35

I don't think that's enough money for all of these subjects they want to resolve, I understand that that's a lot of money over 30 years, but I just think that that money would be better off used to solve one of those problems.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

Despite this, many held the perspective that any new funds are welcome and necessary.

Gaining more money for the area sounds positive, without knowing too much obviously about it, not my area of expertise but more money sounds good as it will help areas in need of that.

Group 2, Skipton residents, aged 25-35

Housing and Regeneration

Proposals for more funding and powers to support house building prompted much discussion in most groups, and several major themes emerged.

Firstly, many discussed the need for more housing and genuinely 'affordable housing' particularly in York. Residents in York noted that house prices are high, and perceived that they were often out of the price range for people already living there and that people can get more for their money elsewhere. In this respect more money and powers to build new housing is seen as a positive.

Affordable housing and York, they're just two things that don't really go together any more no matter how many times people try to resolve it. What's affordable in one location would still unlikely be affordable in York"

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

However, positivity about new housing was tempered by concerns about the pressure new housing developments could have on existing infrastructure. Many gave examples of new homes putting pressure on the existing road network, health services, schools and other local amenities. These concerns were particularly pronounced in rural areas but were also expressed in urban areas like York and Harrogate.

Now due to the growth of Pickering, it's becoming more and more difficult. The infrastructure isn't keeping pace with the population and the building that's occurring.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

We're struggling at the moment with healthcare, dentist, I know some people have concerns with schools, so if more people are coming in how are they going to deal with it, we're going to need more dentists and surgeries with more

houses, then you're going to have to keep expanding as a result you will harm the farmland and things like that and there's only so far you can go.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Finally, some were concerned about whether houses are genuinely affordable. Some were concerned that new housing being built will not be genuinely affordable or focused on specific groups such as students.

"When we say affordable [in terms of house prices], we need to define who can afford this.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

It's great that they are building new homes but people have to be able to afford to live in them, I feel like the council are letting local people down, in favour of the student population and tourists.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Transport

Transport was another major topic of discussion in terms of the devolution deal. Few were aware of what the Key Routes Network was and so had few opinions on the devolution deals impact.

There was a general perception that roads in York, especially the ring roads around towns and cities have become more congested. This links with housing development and population growth as discussed earlier. Residents were positive about the inclusion of transport and travel in the devolution deal and some were hopeful that the deal could lead to improvements, primarily because decision makers will live in the region and experience issues related to devolution.

For people who have to commute to work by car, York is a horrendous place to negotiate, you just need York races to be on and the whole city is at a standstill.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Infrastructure being in place ready for development, to include roads.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

Residents also discussed buses. Many who rely on buses to get around the region felt that the services offered are infrequent, often unreliable and many important destinations like dentists are not accessible via the bus network. Older residents linked this with deregulation of bus services more generally.

Issues with busses were more impactful on young people, who rely on buses to get to school/college/apprenticeships etc., and people who do not drive. In general residents thought that bus networks should be considered alongside devolution proposals to build more houses – as the two are closely aligned.

I know others who use buses regularly who say the buses aren't on time or there are no drivers available. I live just off Hull Road and there are two bus services, supposed to be every 10 minutes, and if one bus isn't full the other one is.

Group 8, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

These bus companies are just trying to make a profit out of routes.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

If they extended the bus routes to areas they don't go now and it was free people would use it to go into town.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

I rely on buses and trains to go to school, three or four times out of the five day school week the buses don't turn up.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

As discussed earlier, there was a general perception that the rail network in York and North Yorkshire is underdeveloped and that it is hard to travel across and out of the region via trains, as well as being expensive. Some were unsure whether the devolution deal will be able to address this issue as the rail network extends beyond the York and North Yorkshire area.

Rail network is shocking.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

Some of the rail, there's constant delays, they're private companies as well... you go from London to York and you pay £180 to sit on a floor, a lot of these issues I still struggle to see how devolution will solve these issues.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

Skills and Employment

The skills offer did not prompt much discussion amongst the groups. While younger residents and those with teenage children felt that education and adult education is important many felt this element of the proposal lacked detail, and some felt there needed to be more emphasis on vocational training and apprenticeships.

All young people in Harrogate are persuaded to stay on at school and go to university and the college has struggled forever to provide Apprenticeships in direct competition to the universities.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

I know a lot of it so far has been negative, but I think Adult Education and the point on that is excellent, I've recently come back into education and I think if they help people do that, that's a really good thing, at the moment it's all virtual and I'm really struggling but if I could meet them face to face that would be great, and it's all online and I think its brilliant that they're thinking about doing it.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

There was also a lack of detail about employment in the proposals. Whilst residents generally felt that the region had low unemployment, especially in areas such as Harrogate, some were concerned about the effect of independent shops closing on small businesses in York city centre.

Carbon Negative Region

Some residents were unsure whether it is possible to achieve the goal of becoming a carbon negative region. As the discussions took place around COP 27 some had a heightened awareness of the challenges of decarbonisation. As a consequence, some were concerned that the proposals represented an

attempt at 'greenwashing,' rather than proposals that will make a difference. In particular, there was a concern that it will be difficult to achieve carbon emission targets alongside housebuilding and resultant population growth.

Generally, so, the environmental stuff – because I study that. I find it hard to understand how you can build houses and stuff, and ensure it's carbon neutral, like sometimes I think it's easy to put a stamp on it, but the practicality isn't there and a lot can be hidden in that term, a lot of greenwashing can take there, I'd like to see a lot more detailed plans.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

£7m is a drop in the ocean isn't it.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Residents discussed the challenges of getting people to make changes that are beneficial in terms of carbon emissions but also inconvenient or difficult to achieve. There was an emphasis on making it easier and more accessible to switch to public transport for instance.

I know we are quite a small city but to get traffic off the road there has to be a benefit to us.

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

Living on a main road the pollution levels are ridiculous so it's great to put money into things like that, but we'll have to put money into that as well to allow [green economic growth] to happen, I live in a 1930s house how am I going to make that work, I can't afford to buy an electric car. From my side of York I see the electric park and ride buses coming back and forth every 15 minutes with hardly anybody on them, and they are there in preference to a service for local people.

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

To improve the offer, some suggested more funding and also more community driven projects. One resident advocated locally driven ground up approaches adopted in areas like Cornwall as examples to follow.

I think if you're looking at investment in communities, the best place to go in rewilding projects and things like that, if you look at places like Cornwall, they have heavy involvement in their environment stuff and it encourages more people to come to their area, it's something we can really use to bring in more jobs and people in, but we just don't. Investment in that will improve other aspects too, as evidence shows green spaces impact mental health too, especially in North Yorkshire as it's known for its beauty.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner functions

Discussion about the Mayor's role as a Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner was less detailed, partly because many were unaware that Police and Fire Commissioners are currently elected locally. Some residents expressed concern over whether a Mayor should have these additional responsibilities considering the other functions they will also fulfil.

If they have the sole power to decide whether the finances toward the fire commissioner goes and other funding goes, that doesn't sound like the best idea to me personally.

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30
It's a lot of responsibility for one person to have.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Views on the level of crime in the region differed. As discussed earlier, some in central York referred to thefts, a minority in Harrogate discussed the problem of drugs in the town, and some living more rurally felt the levels of policing in their area were insufficient, leading to the introduction of a Neighbourhood Watch programme by residents.

If efficiencies can come from this then that's fine but I don't think police and fire are a huge problem here

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

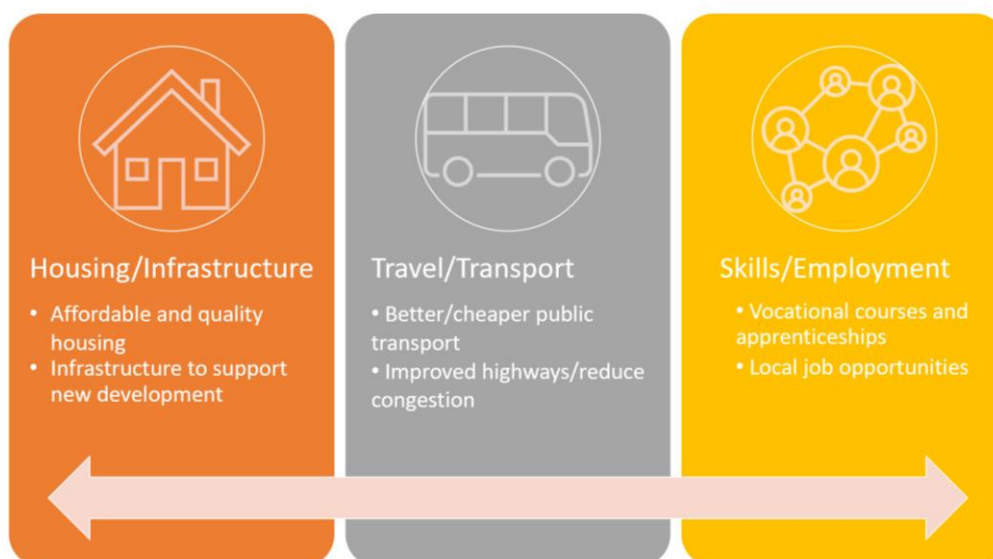
Are we going to get more police? There are rural watch people that help as there aren't enough police to man the area.

Group 2, Skipton residents, aged 25-35

Prioritisation of proposals

Residents were asked to complete a prioritisation exercise, to understand the relative importance of the different aspects of the proposals for them. They were asked to list their top three priorities in relation to devolution.

Across the groups the top three priorities were:



Housing and Infrastructure

Much of the discussion around housing either focussed on availability of “truly” affordable housing, which was often the concern of younger residents, or it was linked to new housing developments being built without the infrastructure in place to service people moving into these homes and local areas.

There are so many new homes being built around Harrogate and they're not really affordable for the average person who works, and I am a primary school teacher in a village and the people moving in are not sending their kids to the village school, it's affecting the doctors, they are over-subscribed, and if I have to go for a doctors appt it's a 30 minute drive so that's a knock on effect on fuel costs as well.

Group 9, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

Infrastructure being in place ready for development, to include roads, schools, workplaces we really do need workplaces.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

I'm happy to have more housing, as long as it's not anywhere I live because I'm worried it will have a negative impact on my local services and my access to them

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

The first priority is quality of low-cost homes, as we are currently renting but are looking in the market as we are both working

Group 2, Skipton residents, aged 25-35

Travel and Transport

The themes discussed mainly focused on access to good value, frequent and reliable public transport and having better highway infrastructure and maintenance. There was also discussion on congestion both within York and the surrounding areas and in more rural locations like Pickering and Skipton.

When you hit 16 you have to pay an adult bus fare but you're still studying at school, and you don't have an adult wage. When I was 16, I had a part time job one day a week but only paying £20 or £30

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

Improving buses so I can get into town without using a car, but not cycling lanes though because local changes didn't benefit the locals

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Highways and transport investment, what about the rail network, and if we're trying to reduce traffic on the roads, the rail network around here is shocking.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

It impacts me every day when I drive over potholes, the roads are in dire states

Group 8, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

I am an asthma sufferer and the traffic is at a standstill between 2 and 5pm most days and this time of year it gets worse

Group 8, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+



Skills and Employment

The discussion on skills and employment often focussed on having access to vocational opportunities and apprenticeships for young people who don't wish to go to university and having good local job opportunities to keep skills and young people in the area to enable growth.

My son couldn't get a job here and he's moved to Manchester now

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

I think that T courses and apprenticeships will be very helpful, and after lockdown, people don't want a pure work focus any more, they want a way of staying in education

Group 9, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

I don't feel like it supports a wide variety of people, it only supports people who are academically smart

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

Jobs and jobs opportunities, I had to move out when I was 17 and join the military through apprenticeship because there wasn't a lot, but you want to keep talent in the area,

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Landowners' views on Devolution

In general, landowners expressed similar views as residents about the devolution proposals. Landowners were also asked for their specific views on the Natural Capital Investment Plan aspect of the deal.

Initial opinions

Landowners were cautiously optimistic about the devolution deal. There was a sense that the structure of the combined authority will ensure it is not 'urban dominated' and will also take on board the needs and concerns of more rural issues, which landowners were apprehensive about.

'But the devil is in the detail so how things play out may not be what we are all hoping for'

However, there were some concerns about the amount of funding available to the new authority. Several argued that £18m was a comparatively small amount of money and were unsure whether the new funding streams would match the

amount of money given to lower tier authorities before being consolidated into North Yorkshire Council.

The old North Yorkshire itself spent over a billion a year so what's £18m, it's a fraction of one percent.

Housing

Landowners believed there were plenty of available sites rurally to help provide new housing as described in the proposals and felt this should be a focus, especially in terms of developing more rural villages. They echoed residents' concerns about the impact of lack of infrastructure on existing services.

They were unsure whether the £50m allocated to York brownfield regeneration was a good use of available funding given the perceived ease of funding such regeneration with private funding.

They were particularly interested in how a new combined authority will impact planning in the region. They generally felt that in the past, approaches to planning varied across the region and that planning policy seemed to not have a good understanding of rural issues. For instance, some discussed how planning would not classify rural villages as viable settlements, preventing developers from building in these areas despite the need for development.

Instead, they believed planning focused on market towns where planning requirements were more straightforward to fulfil, but where the infrastructure already struggles to keep pace with developments.

They also questioned the impact of a MCA on the National Planning Policy Framework but believed it should lead to greater consistency and balance of planning approach from combining different planning departments in authorities.

Rather than putting more pressure on market towns which are already overloaded, put a bit of development on to each of the villages over the next 10 years, which would not only go a long way to finding the new houses we need but they would also be in the right places.

It's very easy for a good planner to get a thousand houses approved in an urban setting than in a village because they know the system, it's harder rurally but people just need to come and talk to us.

Transport

Landowners were critical of the current system of transport managed by the local councils, and were concerned about whether a new Mayor would be able to solve these problems when the devolution deal outlines that maintenance will remain within the control of county councils. They highlighted the A64 and the A59 and the northern part of the ring road around York as highways that need particular attention.

The A170 isn't too bad but as soon as you go off the A170 it's a minefield of potholes.

Landowners emphasised that the problem in rural areas is not about individual services (i.e., buses or trains) but a bigger problem of ensuring that people, especially young people, can get to the places where they need to go, such as work, school, college etc.

What is key here is that transport understands rural; people don't get it, we're not just talking about the A roads or buses or West Coast main line, we are talking about how these 16–18year olds get to their places of training and work without access to a car. East Yorkshire has had a very good Wheels to Work scheme because young people can't afford cars.

Skills and employment

Some landowners were also employers in the hospitality sector and identified that young people age 16-18 need education to help them to better identify what they are good at, and that this could be facilitated by more vocational options such as apprenticeships and T level courses to help them better train for the types of business and employment available in the region.

The hotel and catering world is pretty strong in York and North Yorkshire.

Police/ Fire/Crime Commissioner

Landowners were generally positive about plans in this area as they felt that it was difficult to gauge whether progress was being made by the current Commissioner so having a Mayor take on this responsibility would help with transparency, and free up the council on providing services.

Carbon negative region

Landowners were particularly interested in proposals towards becoming a carbon negative region. They welcomed the possibility of becoming more involved in informing the delivery of these ambitions, especially in areas such as flood management, bio-diversity net gain and electric grid infrastructure.

Ultimately, landowners believed this aspect of the proposals was broadly the right direction for the combined authority but questioned whether the new Mayor should have overarching responsibility for this aspect.

Landowners emphasised the complexity of Natural Capital Investment (NCI) and felt the development of a NCI Plan was unrealistic with only a budget of £7m – they believed this money would be best spent by the Mayor to help them lobby for additional funding in this area.

Landowners emphasised that NCI is an area still in its infancy and requires specialist expertise to develop strategies. As such, they were unsure whether a Natural Capital Investment Plan should sit with a Mayor. They needed to feel confident that any Mayor will put in place a good procurement process and that the plan would include rural areas.

Damage on flooding is in the hundreds of millions so a figure of £7m is not going to dent that, so it would be much better spent on lobbying for national funding or something that stops all these houses flooding for good.

Unless they are going to incorporate a significant private sector funding element into their proposals, I am not convinced it is worth starting on and a lot of these eco system services have no defined agreed output mechanism, so that is challenging.

North Yorks council have already said they will be going net zero by 2030 as a council, but that aim is based on zero understanding of how to measure it and

how to do it, and bio diversity net gain coming in on planning. They think it is just planting some trees and they get to net zero rather than analysing all the different areas you can save carbon.

It's just political spiel and probably isn't going to happen, we can all do our little bit which adds up, and in practice will be very hard to deliver, so encouraging people as individuals to do more, as well as councils would be by far the best thing, and it's probably too much for someone like a Mayor to deliver.

North Yorks as a county has a great deal of natural capital, we are the largest county in England so somewhere we need to sort out the conflict between conservation and climate. If we plant lots of trees everywhere that will change the landscape dramatically so I think we need to ask do we want that.

If you are going to write a good NCI plan and the Mayor is really good at campaigning at winning elections what we probably need is confidence in how the plan will be procured.

If the fund is there to help put NCI plans together and give them credence I think that would be a good thing.

We provide a huge amount of eco system services and it seems the thing that everyone identifies with that is planting trees but there are a lot of other services we can provide including clean water and flood prevention but at the end of the day trying to quantify that has beaten some of the best brains in the country and the whole carbon accounting issue is fraught with difficulties as no two people seem to agree on it.

Mitigating the withdrawal of CAP investment

Landowners believed that delivery of biodiversity net gain could be made more effective and simpler by paying hill farmers to use their land to deliver biodiversity net gain. Enabling landowners to contribute to biodiversity net gain would also help, for example in the case of private developers who are unable to offer biodiversity net gains on-site.

A Mayor could enable greater efficiency in this area by helping to introduce a system for 'scoring' the different categories of biodiversity net gains such as water courses, hedgerows, grassland habitats etc. and alleviating current sensitivities around taking productive agricultural land out of production and allowing them to be used if they also supported biodiversity net gain.

Perhaps the Mayor could help contribute a 'habitat bank' into which developers pay, and strategically seek sites across their local planning authority.

We could do things to allow landowners and developers to all benefit and that is something that the Mayor could deliver.

Creating a Mayoral Combined Authority

In this part of the discussion residents were asked to read the proposals for governance arrangements:

- The proposed Deal requires the York and North Yorkshire Authorities establish a new Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) that would be led by an elected Mayor.
- The mayor will not make decisions on their own but will work in partnership with the Unitary Councils.
- There will be a board with the mayor and two representatives from the two unitary councils to make decisions together. So the mayoral combined authority will have a total of 5 voting members.
- A Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) would be created, with the first Mayor for York and North Yorkshire elected in May 2024, by registered voters in the City of York and North Yorkshire Council areas.
- Each mayoral term will last for four years.

Understanding of a Mayoral Combined Authority and Governance Structure

The terminology and structure of a Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) was unfamiliar to many, so expectations of how a new MCA would work and the role and functions of a Mayor were either based on comparisons with existing county council two tier structures, or other regions with MCAs if residents were aware of these.

Awareness and detailed understanding of local politics and the way existing Councils worked was based on either experience of communicating with local councils, or from reports in the media which were often negative. Responses to change therefore generated positive hopes of growth but also fear of being worse off.

I'm very disappointed in local government, one example being the departure of the Chief Executive of York Council who was kept on full pay for 18 months and given a £400,000 payoff

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

Few residents used the term Unitary Council and only a very small minority spontaneously referred to the upcoming reorganisation to a single North Yorkshire Unitary Council.

The proposals for the MCA in York and North Yorkshire generated several questions about how the two unitary councils would be combined and what potential benefits and disadvantages this might bring to residents. A theme running through discussions about the MCA was that York and North Yorkshire were very different in terms of their size, populations and needs and that there was a rural/urban divide which made it difficult to see how the new MCA would be able to manage differences and prioritise urban and rural residents needs

fairly or standardise services without potentially damaging the unique character and profile of both urban and rural parts of the region.

People from rural areas may miss out, as places like York and Harrogate attract lots of tourists so the focus might be solely on trying to make them areas look good, and little areas/villages then miss out.

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Scarborough is quite a run-down area, my initial thoughts were that places like Harrogate would get more money but places like Scarborough need more money, then are they going to get it? Will it be split fairly?

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

They're going to look at where the profit is, not these little areas, they've always done this in the past.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Questions about the MCA structure and functions

There was a general lack of clarity about the structure of a new MCA and how this would bring benefits over the existing Council structures.

I really don't understand how this is going to be different. Everything will be exactly the same.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

Residents felt they might be reassured if they understood how an MCA structure had benefited other MCA regions. For example, some were aware that in West Yorkshire MCA transport had been subsidised and this was of interest, but residents assumed that it would be more difficult to introduce in their region because North Yorkshire's rurality could make this less feasible, or that York may need to subsidise rural fares to make this work.

Residents expected each council to have a voice in the new MCA so were pleased to see this reflected in the proposals.

However, there were some reservations about how the new board would be structured. It was assumed that each of the two representatives from each of the Unitary Councils would probably have a team of people working for them helping to brief them about issues but the primary roles/ functions of each of the two representatives from each Unitary Council were unclear. Residents wanted to know whether the new Mayor would be involved in selecting each of the representatives, or whether the Councils would decide, or whether residents would be voting these representatives in.

These discussions led to questions about the potential political structure of the Board and if / how this would impact the fairness of decisions made about allocating funds across the region.

Residents with more experience of their local councils believed it would be important to choose voting members who focus on change and growth in order to deliver on the proposals.

The budget might be biased, I was wondering if some independent people could be part of the board so they could have more input on it

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

In principle it sounds good but the public sector has a tendency to give people jobs not to offend them so my only concern is they don't give someone a job just because they've been ages in a particular council, because that won't drive change or growth. I would want people with very strong backgrounds, either commercial or professional experience in the areas they are going to have to make decisions on, not just someone who has worked in the council for decades

Group 8, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

The structure seems right with everyone being accountable, but it's about how people would be put in place, it all depends on having the right people with the right frame of mind, not just people who bicker and argue

Group 8, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

Some residents wondered where the new combined authority would be located and what impact this would have on accessibility. A few thought that the new MCA offices might be based in Northallerton where North Yorkshire Council currently resides and this was felt to be relatively remote for those nearer York. Some also wondered if the mayor would be based in the same location.

Overall, the perceived benefits and disadvantages of having a MCA were as shown in this table, which will be discussed more fully.

POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES OF MCA	Greater accountability from having an elected Mayor	Greater transparency of decision making and control over resource allocation	Greater efficiencies and economies of scale
POTENTIAL DISADVANTAGES OF MCA	Fairness of how funds and resources are allocated	Feasibility of standardising services	Exacerbated rural / urban divide

Perceived benefits of a Mayoral Combined Authority

A key perceived benefit of an MCA was that it would enable better local decision making and give more control over what happens in their region.

It's important to be in charge of your own region rather than it all coming from Westminster. It's great to have money and that it will be managed locally, a local voice will be listened to which is important, it will be challenging to prioritise the need over the area it has to cover though.

Group 9, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

I think a key thing that would be positive would be that people locally would be helping to make the decisions, rather than someone in London, I think the word local is a positive bit.

Group 2, Skipton residents, aged 25-35

Residents assumed that having representatives from each Council on the Board would mean collaborative decision making and that the mayor would be held to account.

Another key benefit of an MCA was that standardising services across the region would make things fairer for all residents.

If you have one approach you haven't got small individual local authorities and councils who create their own restrictions or use outdated criteria for funding guidelines

Group 8, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

The one thing that does sound good, I kind of agree on principle that decisions in your local area should be made by people who are local... if the positive of this is that it cuts off a chain of going somewhere else when asking permission to do something then that's great

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

Residents believed that changing to two unitary councils offered a major potential benefit in terms of economies of scale, by reducing the total number of staff employed across York Council and North Yorkshire Council, with this cost saving being passed on to residents, and a reduction in bureaucracy from combining the two-tier structure into one. However, a small minority believed that because the unions were in favour of the devolution deal this could mean that staff would just be reshuffled with no saving on HR / no efficiencies.

Perceived disadvantages of a Mayoral Combined Authority

Because of the lack of detail in the proposals, residents identified more disadvantages than advantages for the new MCA.

Primarily, many felt that because York and North Yorkshire were very different in terms of their size, population types and needs, although a reduction in bureaucracy and staffing levels could offer huge benefits the detail was not included to indicate how this would be achieved and where cost savings would be made, and there were concerns that the nuances of local needs would be more difficult to identify and address with a one-tier structure.

York is a massive area, and there's not potentially going to be enough funding for everyone to get their priorities so how do you work together, it's just such a big area

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

It all looks lovely on paper and it sounds great but in reality will it take away a lot from our city being able to make its own decisions and not just being part of North Yorkshire?

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

What hasn't been explained here is why they are doing it, they have said what the benefits [of an MCA] will be but not how they will accrue those benefits. I haven't seen the word 'saving' mentioned in the document. The one thing that isn't stated in here is how the removal of duplication is going to reduce costs. We just have to trust that the 'powers that be' that they use the money wisely

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

If the new MCA resulted in a reduction in council offices and relocation to North Yorkshire this could also lead to a lack of accessibility to the new MCA for residents.

In addition, the lack of detail in the proposals generated mixed views on whether an MCA structure would exacerbate the rural/urban divide or offer cost savings for residents throughout the region.

Concerns were raised about how fairness in decision making would be achieved in terms of allocating Mayoral and other funds across the region and of addressing the different priorities identified in the proposals.

If you have one mayor for both, the focus will be on York, they're going to overlook the smaller areas that's always how it happened in the past.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Would it standardise each area? Rather than each area competing for more resource.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

They talk about investing in local priorities but if they're taking out a layer, Ryedale district council will no longer exist, how will they assess what is really needed at a local level when they're even more distant. How will that happen?

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

I just think the needs from Yorkshire and North Yorkshire will be very different, like York is a very busy tourist city. When I think of York I think of hustle and busy its somewhere you go it's totally different, so I think it's weird to combine the two.

Group 2, Skipton residents, aged 25-35

Someone from York wouldn't understand the concerns of here. They should have a spokesperson from here... because we all know urban issues are different to rural issues.

Group 2, Skipton residents, aged 25-35

I can say I am completely opposed to it, I really don't think places like North Yorkshire and York will work – they're completely different with different needs, with different members of society, York is a university town whereas Whitby is a place where people go to retire, so I don't think having a joint mayor is going to work unless you have a middle man, it's just never going to work unless they have a mayor in each area.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Although not overtly specified in the proposals, residents were concerned about whether they would ultimately have to contribute individually in order to achieve the plans for the region.

In terms of the extra funding it sounds positive but as long as it does not end up coming out of our council tax, and the reality isn't that we're actually paying for it.

Group 2, Skipton residents, aged 25-35

In particular, residents from more rural areas wanted reassurance that the uniqueness and difference of rural locations would not be eroded by standardisation.

Many believed that York would be prioritised in decision making because of its size and the importance of tourism to the city and surrounding areas. Rural residents from North Yorkshire felt their needs were more likely to be ignored because of the likely greater amount of funding required to address rural issues.

Particularly in smaller rural towns, there was a concern that dissolving district councils would mean a reduction in access to local government generally, and connection to customer services, and an erosion of local knowledge and revenue allocation.

People move into areas like this for a reason, and my only fear would be that merging them together would mean it becomes less rural, like they might want to increase the amount of tourism, which would bring in more jobs and money, but I'm afraid it would become more like a city and you need a balance.

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

York is a massive area, and there's not potentially going to be enough funding for everyone to get their priorities so how do you work together, it's just such a big area

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

The local councils are already massively overwhelmed with what they're trying to do on a day-to-day basis, so if you're adding to that it is going to overwhelm them more.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

Governance structure

Views of the governance structure tended to indicate a lack of understanding about the intricacies of how this might work in practice and a general feeling that this did not sound democratic.

It was difficult to believe that five voting members on the new MCA would be able to base their decisions fairly and without conflict and this related to residents' concerns that the new devolved council would be covering too large an area, so residents wanted to know more about how this structure would work in practice and the type of support each representative and the Mayor would receive. Some questioned how conflicts in voting would be resolved and how fairness in decision making would be ensured. Some wanted community involvement in decision making to ensure fairness.

That is a lot of power in very few hands.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

To get a fair representation there should be more than five, even if they aren't official members.

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

[So it's a] Mayor who runs the area, who has other board members who help him make the decisions. They should have a sample of the community, rather than five people who might not even live in the area.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Not quite democratic, and needs to be more democratic and have more voting, based on population size and age wise, everyone should have a vote rather than just councillors who vote, a mini election, we should vote for all members on the board.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

I think it's like having a debate with two sides, and the mayor is like a judge who comes to the final decision and that mayor may favour an area more than another one.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

It sounds like only five people will make all the decisions whereas now we have a much broader spectrum of people with different experience and representing people, that sounds very worrying if it doesn't go well.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Understanding of the role and functions of a Mayor

There was a general level of confusion about the role of a mayor in a MCA. Some believed that a Mayoral role would be similar to that of a Chief Executive of the council. A few confused a Mayor of a MCA with the ceremonial role of Lord Mayor of York. Some thought there would be two Mayors, one for each of the Unitary Councils.

Would it be the Mayor of North Yorkshire or the Mayor of York? North Yorkshire is one of the biggest counties and spans over a big area. My impression is that it's the Mayor of York and then they consult with the different various councils across North Yorkshire.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

You could call him a Chief Executive, couldn't you?

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

I think the title of Mayor is wrong, he/ she is ultimately the CEO of a large corporation.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

There were also questions around the election of the Mayor. These included questions around how a candidate shortlist would be drawn up, which was important because local people would be voting on these individuals.

There was a level of scepticism about who would want to perform the role of Mayor, based on negative media reports about Mayors in other regions and recent negative media about individuals in the current government.

Residents questioned whether the election would be party political or if candidates would be voted for as individuals. There was a preference for the new Mayor to be elected as an individual as residents were concerned that

politically based appointments may perpetuate a lack of transparency about decision making, allocation of funds, and resources.

In addition, there were concerns that elections could become a competition between different geographical areas, with the largest by population size dominating elections and eventual allocation of resources and funding.

Would there be political party affiliations, would you have a labour candidate, a conservative candidate?... Is this going to be people voting on party affiliations rather than what they [the candidate for mayor] will do?... It would kind of be nice if it wasn't. Sometimes when you get local candidates and stuff, they kind of hide their party affiliations, and it just becomes noise and nothing local.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

You constantly see politicians using personal gain.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

With it being just one person, I'm worried is it going to be like a dictatorship and are they going to have the views of the constituents at heart or are they doing it for gain for themselves.

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

I think the worrying thing is, if there is a mayor are there certain people from certain areas going to be putting money under the table for her/him and are they going to do certain things to certain areas, and then the £18million is spent only in a couple of areas.

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

In terms of the type of profile of an individual who would become Mayor of a MCA, residents wanted someone who would communicate with the community, someone with knowledge of the region-either through living or working there, and preferably someone who was not a longstanding Council employee because this could potentially taint perceptions of their potential to deliver change and growth.

Do we have a clever enough person in Yorkshire to take on this job?!

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

We need someone who is going to be proactive and get things done.

Group 9, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

Once we vote this mayor in, what do we then have a say in? Can we still vote for things, or do they make a manifesto and promise things but then change everything anyways?

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

Whilst residents were given information about how the new Mayor would be elected and their length of term, they were unclear about who the Mayor would report to in their role and who they would be accountable to in the event of not delivering on their plans.

How local is local? Could a Leeds person become the Mayor of York? And I know that the title means that they will have decisions on what's going on in North Yorkshire, but how is that person managed so that it's fair. Because then the things that's going to happen is that it becomes a population vote... I'm

going to vote for a York person because I'm from York, where they're going to vote for a Leeds person.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

Who can sack the mayor?

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

Questions were also raised about why a mayor isn't going to be elected until 2024 and how the new MCA will operate until then.

As far as I am aware, they're starting the council restructures. The new council is going to be live from 2023, but the new Mayor is going to be 2024. How will they run in-between...without a mayor?

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

Those who were aware of Mayors in other regions felt it would be useful to know more about how they have delivered against proposals in those regions to feel reassured that this role could make a difference to local people.

Perceived benefits of a Mayor

The potential benefits of having a Mayor focused on having one person responsible for the region who would help to provide greater transparency of MCAs plans and someone to hold accountable if those plans are not delivered.

Having someone to represent the whole region was felt to be particularly important for those in North Yorkshire who felt the more rural areas of the region were currently side-lined in favour of York.

An assumption, based on Mayors in other regions, was that a Mayor would be much more involved with the local community which would benefit decision making for the region.

In addition, having an individual who could generate lots of media attention and raise the profile of the region could help with inward investment.

It's better having someone locally telling you how they are spending the money but you need more detail on how they will deliver it.

Group 6, York residents, aged 18+

Andy Burnham in Greater Manchester has been doing a lot of work on the transport network... a mayor elected by the people would be much more involved with the community.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

Andy Burnham always seems like he cares about the people, he's on TV a lot, and Tracy Brabin, she seems really enthusiastic and honest, she might not be but she seems as if she cares about the region and the people.

Group 9, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

I could probably go into my bin and pull out different leaflets with loads of information about the different initiatives that local councils take... but a lot of the times it does just become a lot of noise around it... if this was going to be implemented it would be interesting to see how this changes how the messaging comes across.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

I like the idea, knowing that it will go through someone closer to home than someone from government the way it currently does, we have an MP in the area, but it has to go through parliament, whereas now it won't be the case. It would be nicer to have someone representing us, our own mayor, representing each little area.

Group 7, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Perceived disadvantages of a Mayor

There was a certain level of mistrust aimed at politicians generally and it was felt this could potentially influence the role of a Mayor such that anyone who wanted to take on the role may only be doing so to further their own political ambitions.

Based on what I've seen of Brabin and Burnham they just seem to be clashing with central government and saying 'oh I'd have done this' and vocally banging the drum for local people but really, they are only looking after their own political ambitions.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Residents were concerned that a Mayor would struggle to address the needs of the very different areas of the region unless they were 'a local' who would have a greater understanding of the regional differences and potential solutions. Someone who wasn't local may be swayed to prioritise more urban priorities.

It depends where the mayor comes from. If someone from Pickering they'd look after Pickering.

Group 5, Pickering residents, aged 50+

I'm a little bit more worried about these proposals than I thought because of the vagueness, and if the mayor comes from York he will get more pressure from locals to make changes there.

Group 3, Harrogate residents, aged 65+

Residents were concerned generally about whether a mayor would be able to deliver on their mandate, based on other Mayors from MCAs who had struggled.

I think it's a good and a bad idea. There's a mayor now in West Yorkshire named Tracy and she's appalling. I moved from there to North Yorkshire because it's a nicer area. The city centre wasn't very safe, and the transport was poor, and she came saying she's going to do this, but she didn't deliver, and it can be quite negative, that's why I agree there needs to be a lot more people in the conversation and not just that one person.

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Young residents felt the Mayor might struggle to identify or relate to the needs of people in their age group

Stereotypically the mayor is going to be a lot older than everyone that's here, so it's going to be a different point of view to what we are saying.

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

There were also some concerns about whether the Mayor was the right person to adopt the responsibility of the Police and Fire Commissioner roles. The role of Mayor seemed to be a wide ranging and substantial role to deliver and taking on the responsibilities of the Police/Fire/Crime Commissioner did not seem a logical addition given the specialist expertise required and could be perceived as a step too far in terms of the amount of power allocated to a Mayor.

I think it would be more what people are looking for if they had someone just concentrated on the city and then someone to focus on the surrounding areas.

Group 1, York residents, aged 18-30

If they have the sole power to decide whether the finances toward the fire commissioner goes and other funding goes, that doesn't sound like the best idea to me personally.

Group 4, York and North Yorkshire residents, aged 18-30

Will the Mayor have a clue, he is so far removed from what is happening on the ground, I think it's a step too far asking for the Mayor to handle this as well, and I know that the three most recent appointments in the major roles in the fire service were people from South Yorkshire who won't know anything about where are the vulnerable areas in this region or where you need the most amount of staff. Until last year I was in the fire service and Zoe Metcalfe has just decided to close one of the big fire stations in York but I dare say you won't get a reduction in your council tax.

Group 9, North Yorkshire residents, aged 18+

Landowner's views of creating a Mayoral Combined Authority

Landowners' views of creating a Mayoral Combined Authority generally echoed those of residents in terms of how the voting members would be chosen and conflict managed and if a Mayor would be involved in choosing the cabinet. They believed that a MCA could deliver cost savings from reducing the number of borough councils and could be successful providing it was not urban dominated. They questioned how a MCA would impact the National Planning Policy Framework.

Landowners were broadly positive about introducing a Mayor to the region, based on their knowledge of other Mayors in MCAs who had been successful in delivering devolution deals in other regions and attracting inward investment. For York and North Yorks, landowners a Mayor needed to help deliver rural growth.

They believed that a Mayor would offer transparency and accountability and should focus their time on delivering a small number of 'special projects' which should include ambitions for becoming carbon negative. Other than this they questioned how priorities for the region would be decided on, and how the Mayor would be accountable for these.

Landowners believed the success of the MCA would be heavily dependent on appointing the right person as Mayor. They identified several important qualities and attributes for a Mayor:

- someone who is very familiar with the region and appreciates the needs of rural communities – ‘a rural champion’
- a natural leader,
- a good communicator,
- has entrepreneurial flair,
- good negotiator
- can find solutions to existing problems and challenges barriers to progress
- appeals to a wide range of people,
- natural charisma,
- ability to source additional funds when required eg from government

I think it will be easier for people to relate to an individual that they vote for rather than parties and cohorts of anonymous commissioners, so maybe a Mayor is a good thing rather than the bit of money which could prove to be illusory if the government decide to cut the block grant to local government.

It would help if they have an understanding of rural issues and the rural economy, and someone who is prepared to listen, and adapt if necessary.

It needs to be someone who has some sort of power and influence and this person has got to have the courage to stand up and embarrass departments and authorities who are standing in the way of progressing things as well as having the negotiating skills to get them on board, you don't want someone who is lily livered and will run and hide if barked at by a Chief Planning Officer, that won't work, they need to have some backbone.

Ben Houchen of Tees MCA very much hung his hat on delivering specific projects and making them happen and I can see that approach being quite successful. In other authorities there is an overlap but it's not one person's priority, and if you give it to one person and call that person the Mayor and tell them to get things delivered and bang heads together and find solutions to the problems, go out and get extra funding from government, I can see that being a successful role.

Appendix



Appendix A – Sample of participants

Characteristics/Areas	Number of residents
Total	70
Age	
18 – 30	27
31 – 44	14
45 – 64	12
65 – 75	12
75+	5
Gender	
Male	32
Female	38
Working status	
Working full time/part time	47
Retired	14
Unemployed	4
Homemaker	3
Student	2
Ethnicity	
White	64
BME	6
Disability	
Disability	5
Area	
Harrogate	16
Knaresborough	2
Malton	3
Pickering	7
Scarborough	3
Skipton	4
Whitby	6
York (city and suburbs)	29

Appendix B – Discussion Guides

Resident Discussion Guide



York/ North Yorks Devolution: Residents 1.5 hour Focus Groups Nov/Dec 2022
Discussion guide FINAL

<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explore what influences quality of life in the local area - York/NYorks. Explore understanding and views towards devolution as a concept – in favour/opposed/concerns and why To explore understanding of governance and Mayorality - in favour/opposed/concerns and why To explore residents' relative priorities in devolution delivery in York/NYorks, and perception and expectations of what devolution can/should deliver 	
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N.B. This guide indicates the areas to be explored in the discussion, the likely order in which topics will be covered and the kinds of questions and techniques which may be used. There will be some flexibility of discussion, however, to account for each individual type of audience being interviewed.

Not all respondents will respond to the same level of language or explanation. While the questions below detail how we intend to cover topics in our own 'language', efforts will be made to meet the communication needs of the individuals interviewed.

Timings on the guide are approximate and give an indication of where the emphasis in the conversation will be.

<p>Section 1: Introduction Objectives of this section: Cover the purpose of research and the ground rules of the discussion with participants</p> <p>Moderator to explain structure of session and ground rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thank you for agreeing to take part today Introduce moderator and Westco – independent research company Explain purpose of research discussion. Today we want to talk to you about life in York/North Yorks, and your thoughts on the devolution deal that has been proposed as part of the consultation with residents Emphasise importance of being able to say what you think, no right or wrong answers, everyone is different, be honest A lot to discuss so some areas may receive less time than others, and we will be limiting this discussion to areas that Devolution is responsible for. Reassurance that Westco abides by the MRS Code of Conduct. confidentiality, anonymity, do not pass on your contact details to third parties Our discussion will last around 1.5 hours – Moderator to keep an eye on the time to ensure group does not over run and all key questions are asked Remind participants that the discussion is to be audio recorded. The recording is for our benefit and will not be shared with others. The recording will be deleted at the end of the project. Check participants are happy with this Moderator to switch on Dictaphone Explain that the officers from York and N. Yorks County Council may observe the group – they are interested to hear your views Respondent introductions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please tell me a bit about yourself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First name Age What do you do for a living/or what you do day to day 	5 mins
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living situation (who they live with, where they live in York/N. Yorks, how long have they lived here) <p>MODERATOR TO ASK IN OVER 65's GROUP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you all use the internet/emails/social media? Show of hands Do you feel confident in accessing the internet, or do you need help to do this? Show of hands on confident and on not confident. 	
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<p>Section 2: Quality of Life Objectives of this section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand what is most important to resident's quality of life in York/N. Yorks To explore residents' relative priorities when it comes to their quality of life 	
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<p>Questions Before we get into discussing the devolution I wanted to first ask you about 'quality of life' ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When I use the words 'quality of life' what does that mean to you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why do you suggest this definition of quality of life? What do others think about this definition? What sort of things do you think contribute towards a good quality of life? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow for spontaneous suggestions, then probe on whether the following contribute towards a good quality of life: health, wellbeing, work, family, education, recreation, technology, housing. Ensure participants fully explore aspects that contribute towards quality of life. Which of these are the most important aspects for a good quality of life? What sort of things affect your quality of life in York/N. Yorkshire right now? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What factors affect your quality of life positively? Explore reasons why. Are some of these negative factors more important than others? Why? What factors affect your quality of life negatively? Explore reasons why. Are some of these negative factors more important than others? Why? 	15 mins
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<p>Section 3: Devolution Objectives of this section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore understanding and views towards devolution as a concept – in favour/opposed/concerns and why, and perceptions and expectations of what devolution can/should deliver 	
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<p>Moderator to present slides on Devolution - what it is and what is being proposed. Hand out copies of slides for participants to read and refer to. Remind participants that this is a high level summary of proposals.</p> <p>After handing out presentation on Devolution Proposals ask below questions:</p> <p>3a Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are your views on devolution generally? Are you in favour of it, or do you oppose it? Why? Do you have any concerns about it? Why/what are they? 	5 mins
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shout out what you think are the positive aspects of devolution? Moderator to write list and explore reasons for these positive aspects with participants. Explore across areas such as business, skills, adult education, unemployment, bureaucracy, transport network, housing and regeneration, environment and climate change Shout out what you think are the negative aspects of devolution? Moderator to write list and explore reasons for these negative aspects with participants. Is there anything about devolution that you're not sure if it's positive or negative? What? What makes you not sure? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Probe overall if they feel devolution will mean better decision making and organisation in the region and ability to better meet local needs Probe if concerns come up about fairness in treatment of rural/urban areas Probe whether they feel devolution will support business, improve skills and living standards, create new employment opportunities, improve transport network, secure better outcomes for people, offer better value for money Did you expect to see something in the proposals that isn't here? Is there anything you feel is important that is missing? What? Why do you feel that is important? Do any of the proposals stand out as being particularly important for you/your family? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which ones? Why do you feel they are important? 	
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<p>3b Activity Moderator to ask participants go to activity sheet 1 (table of priorities page 16).</p> <p>Moderator to read out... I now want you to rank the three themes from the proposals that you think will have the biggest positive impact/effect on you and your family's quality of life living in York/N. Yorks.</p> <p>You should rank the factors on the worksheet provided, with number 1 having the biggest impact on your quality of life. If you think there are more than three things that have a big impact on your quality of life, please write these down too.</p>	10 mins
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<p>3c Priorities for devolution Once exercise has been completed, briefly ask each participant in turn to let you know their ranking and then discuss as a group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What ranking have participants have written? Why they have ranked them/chosen these themes and in this order? Explore similarities/differences across the group and whether participants giving the same reasons or different Why would the item ranked #1 be helpful? How would this help you/your family? <p>Moderator: round up discussion and check if there are any further points to mention before moving on.</p>	15 mins
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<p>Section 4: Governance Objectives of this section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explore understanding of governance and Mayorality and explore who is in favour/opposed/concerns and why 	
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<p>Moderator to ask participants to read Governance section of handout (slide 15)</p> <p>Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are your views on having a Combined Mayoral Authority? Is this something that is easy to understand? Or do you think it needs more explanation? What do you think will be the benefits of this? Any disadvantages? What are your views on having a Mayor? Generally, are you in favour, or do you oppose it? Why? Spontaneous comments then: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you think will be the benefits of having a Mayor? Do you have any concerns about having a Mayor? Why/what are they? Are any of you not sure whether it will be a good or bad thing? What is it that is making you not sure? Is it about understanding the role of a Mayor? Or something else? What do you think of these governance proposals? If you were describing them to a friend what would you say? Do any of them stand out as being particularly important for you/your family? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which ones? How are they important? Do you think they will be positive or negative changes? Or not sure? Explore reasons. 	5 mins 20 mins
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<p>Section 5: Round up Moderator to ensure conversations focus on these objectives. Objectives of this section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To summarise what has been said and ask if there is anything else participants want to know. 	
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<p>Moderator to summarise what has been discussed.</p> <p>Question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there any final comments or questions? <p>Moderator read out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thank participants for their time Encourage responses to the online consultation/paper questionnaire and information on the scheme from a local library or the website: www.nydevolution.com <p>Thank and close.</p>	5 mins
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Devolution Deal – York and North Yorkshire Summary

1

Introduction

On 1 August 2022 the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced that the Government was 'minded to' enter into a devolution deal with York and North Yorkshire.

Under the proposed deal, the region would gain local control of at least £540 million of new funding to spend on the things that matter to the people of York and North Yorkshire, together with a range of devolved powers.

2

What is Devolution

Devolution is the transferring of money and functions from central Government to local areas, to enable priority decision making to be made locally.

A Mayoral Combined Authority and directly elected Mayor, will manage the powers and funding to ensure that they serve local people, communities, and businesses, and those who can make decisions that prioritises the communities they serve.

3

What needs to happen for a devolution deal to occur?

The proposed deal states that in order for devolution to occur several things must take place:

- Firstly, the City of York Council and the new North Yorkshire council must agree to the deal.
- These councils must then carry out a public consultation.
- This will then inform the council's decision to progress the decision on devolution with the Secretary of State, who will set out a parliamentary order to approve the deal.

4

What does the deal include?

- New £18m per year for 30 years (£540m in total) through a **Mayoral Investment Fund** to invest in local priorities.
- Investment of up to £50 million to support and deliver the **York Central brownfield regeneration scheme**.
- £7 million investment to enable York and North Yorkshire to drive **green economic growth** towards the ambition to become a carbon negative region.
- £13 million for the **building of new homes on brownfield land** across 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- Investment of up to £2.65 million of projects to deliver **affordable, low carbon homes**.
- **New powers from Government to drive regeneration and build more affordable homes**.
- A commitment to establish a working group to support the **development of Bio Yorkshire***.
- **New transport powers to improve and integrate the regional transport network**.

*Bio Yorkshire – is a programme of innovation for new technology to improve farming and land use in the county and reduce carbon emissions. This is a unique opportunity in the devolution deal and will create new green jobs.

5

What are the potential benefits of a devolution deal?

York and North Yorkshire will benefit from new Mayoral funding streams and continued discussions with Government over further powers and funding to achieve our ambitions.

The proposed deal means that people who know and understand our area will have the authority to make decisions across key areas, such as, the economy, housing and regeneration, skills and transport throughout York and North Yorkshire.

This will bring greater benefits to our cities, region, rural and coastal communities, improvements to people's quality of life and help to drive green economic growth for a carbon negative future

6

Proposals Summary: Governance arrangements

The proposed Deal requires the York and North Yorkshire Authorities to establish a new Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) that would be led by an elected Mayor. **The Mayor will not make decisions on their own** but will work in partnership with the Unitary Councils.

There will be a board with the Mayor and two representatives from the two unitary councils to make decisions together. So the mayoral combined authority will have a total of **5 voting members**.

A Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) would be created, with the **first Mayor for York and North Yorkshire elected in May 2024**, by registered voters in the City of York and North Yorkshire Council areas.

Each mayoral term will last for **four years**.

7

Proposals Summary: Funding and finance functions

- The proposed deal includes **new £18m per year for 30 years (£540m in total)** through a Mayoral Investment Fund to invest in local priorities.
- The Mayor would be required to prepare a draft annual budget for their areas of responsibility based on the powers devolved to them as part of this deal. The Mayor's budget is subject to the approval of the Combined Authority.

8

Proposals Summary:
Transport

- Strategic decisions on transport needs and infrastructure will be taken locally, to make it easier to get around the region – for instance via Key Routes Networks.
- Road maintenance and other local travel services (buses) will remain within the unitary council's powers.
- A single consolidated **transport budget** for development of future transport projects.

Proposals Summary:
Housing and Regeneration

- More money to build new homes
- Opportunity to work with local areas to identify more sites where homes can be built
- More money and partnerships to build low carbon homes and quality homes across the area.

Proposals Summary:
Skills and employment

- Money and powers for Adult Education that are currently held in the centre will be transferred locally and decisions made on local intelligence. This will deliver fairer access to education and more courses that will lead to good jobs through better joined up working
- Promote effective participation in education and training of young people aged 16 and 17.
- Provide support services to young people to encourage, enable and participate in education and training.
- Require relevant institutions in the further education sector to provide appropriate education to specified individuals aged between 16 and 18 years

Proposals Summary:
Carbon negative region

- Improved funding and working relationships to drive our ambitions for a carbon negative region
- Direct engagement with Government and potential funding to enable York and North Yorkshire's ambition to be carbon negative.
- £7 million investment that will enable the area of York and North Yorkshire to drive green economic growth towards their ambitions to be a carbon negative region.
- Development of a York and North Yorkshire Natural Capital Investment Plan

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Proposals Summary:
Transfer of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner functions

- Police, fire and crime powers will transfer to the Mayor
- Setting the police and fire budgets including the council tax precept requirements.
- Appointing (and if necessary suspending or dismissing) the Chief Constable, Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer.
- Being the employer of all Fire and Rescue staff

Your Priorities

Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3

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