



Successful leadership from
a global city on a compact scale

**The continuing case for devolution
and York as a Unitary Authority**

Devolution and local government restructure

| Together, we have a unique opportunity to shape York's future.

Devolution presents opportunities for our city and region, which could secure significant investment in York and the wider region over the next 30 years.

This investment would boost our local economy, help to create jobs, transform our public spaces and make a positive difference to residents, particularly at a time when we are working to build back better from the Coronavirus pandemic.

City of York Council together with North Yorkshire councils have agreed a series of 'Asks' to submit to Government to help secure **a devolution deal for York and North Yorkshire that could unlock significant investment of up to £2.4bn over 30 years**. As a result, York would become a key player in a Mayoral Combined Authority.

The Government has said any devolution deal requires local government to simplify by removing the complex two-tier (County and District) structure in other parts of North Yorkshire.

City of York Council, the only unitary council in the area, provides all the services within its boundaries, whilst for the rest of North Yorkshire service delivery is split between the County Council and the five district and two borough councils.

As a unitary authority already, no change is required for York. We understand that models may be proposed by some district councils which seek to merge our city with an area stretching from the boundaries of Doncaster, to Redcar and Cleveland. It is for North Yorkshire authorities to determine the model that best represents their residents.

However, there is no advantage in changing structures unnecessarily, which could jeopardise a range of crucial projects, create significant upheaval and uncertainty and ultimately, as our size is so much our strength, reduce the impact York can make across the region.

You are an invaluable part of what makes York so special. It is both our size and the people of York that make us who we are today.

As a result, we wanted to share with you our current position and ask for your support, sharing why York is so special and why you chose York as the home of your business/organisation.



Delivering locally, working regionally

York is among the best places to live in the UK, renowned for community spirit and driving innovation inside and outside our historic city walls.

We know from the Talk York Consultation in 2019, which heard from over 5,000 people, that one of our key strengths is our size. The consultation told us that York has all the benefits of city living - access to culture, transport connections, educational and business opportunities and vibrant communities - whilst remaining very much on a human scale.

York is a compact, low-rise, walkable, cyclable, liveable and friendly city. With millions of visitors a year and a population of 210k, it still feels intimate and personal. This personal interaction creates a strong sense of community, which in turn drives social awareness.

“We need to understand the deep significance of the human scale of this city... this human scale is translated into a strong humane quality to society in York. Built on its quaker heritage, York has a strong social conscience, individuality and independent spirit”

Talk York Consultation 2019

This community spirit has contributed to a raft of outstanding accolades for a city of our size:

Key evidence

National and international recognition

- In 2018, the *Sunday Times* recognised York as both the best place to live in the UK and home of the best school in the North, with three of our schools in the top ten of all northern schools. . In 2020, we held onto our place as one of the best places to live in the North.
- The *Happy City Thriving Places* Index notes York is one of the UK’s best places to live
- Public Health England recorded York as the most active city in the North
- The *Cultural and Creative Cities monitor* (and EU report) notes we are the “most culturally vibrant” city in the UK and 7th in Europe for medium size cities.
- UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts designation.

In addition, there is data to suggest that people living in small and medium cities may enjoy a higher quality of life and personal wellbeing relative to their counterparts in larger cities (quality of life) Source: ‘*The Role Of Small And Medium-Sized Towns And Cities In Growing The Northern Powerhouse*’ report 2016.

At just 34km², the built up urban area of York is much smaller than regional centres like Leeds (487 km²) or Greater Manchester (630 km²) or even comparable heritage cities such as Norwich (62km²) or Cambridge (42 km²).

Yet, nestled in the vale of York at the site where two rivers meet, we have been a stronghold, a trading centre and more recently, residents have protected our size through the consultation to develop our Local Plan. We enjoy a unique character that led to some of the most significant social changes of the 20th century.



A community prioritising people

York is large enough to have ambitious goals and provide opportunities for everyone and intimate enough that **every person can make their mark**. We are working together to create fair, compassionate and welcoming communities where collaboration and social vision spark grassroots action.

City of York Council

City of York Council has successfully been a unitary authority since 1996, custodians for and representing this unique, self-governing and historic city.

Working with our partners, the city has innovated and succeeded in a variety of fields:

A distinct identity

Setting York apart from other neighbouring places:

- York contributes a third (£6.35bn) of GVA across York and North Yorkshire and represents its major economic centre.
- In 2019, we declared a climate emergency with a commitment to achieving carbon zero status by 2030. In support of this, we have more electric buses, created a clean air zone and more recently, to support social distancing and rebuild back a better economy, introduced additional pedestrian areas in the city centre.
- With two world-renown universities, York's research and academic excellence contributes to improving the nation's health, pioneering artificial intelligence and protecting our environment (amongst others).
- Our workforce is the most highly skilled in the region and our outstanding schools and college regularly achieve the highest grades at GCSE and A'level.
- We are continuing our tradition of pioneering social housing that is ahead of its time, with a commitment to build 600 passive Haus standard houses, of which 40% will be affordable and available to council tenants or shared ownership.

Digital city

We were the UK's first gigabit city, providing new opportunities for residents and businesses at a time when digital technology has never been more important. We are drawing on our gigabit infrastructure to lead the way in SMART cities transformation in both travel and independent living.

Quality of life and innovation

York has maintained its reputation for quality of life and successfully balanced its status as a historic and cultural city with the development of modern, innovative and sustainable infrastructure, growing the tourism and leisure sector by nearly a third and supporting emerging bio and agri tech economies.

Building Back better

Following the Coronavirus pandemic, we have recently developed a new 1-Year Recovery and Renewal Plan, designed to address the challenges posed by the pandemic and to build back better. This includes further developing crucial regeneration projects in the city, such as York Central, with £77.1 million recently secured from Government to deliver essential infrastructure on the York Central site. At the same time, we are also working with our partners to develop a 10-year city plan, in order to utilise York's strengths and improve the lives of all residents, communities, visitors, students and businesses in the city.

With 210k residents, City of York Council is the median average size of unitary authority in England. With the approval due of the Local Plan, the city will increase to 230k residents.

York, as a mid-sized unitary, is already well-placed to lead a strong recovery from COVID-19. We were the 12th out of 314 authorities in distributing business grants to those who needed it most during COVID-19 and were quick to respond to support the shielded and vulnerable, recruiting volunteers and organising community hubs.

City of York already efficiently provides value for money, since York's taxpayers pay significantly less than in neighbouring districts. Despite our exceptional services, the cost of running services in York are lower too.

Our council tax level is the 7th lowest of any unitary in England, and significantly lower than neighbouring councils. Our core spend per household is on average £265 less per dwelling than in North Yorkshire districts.



Why would changing boundaries matter?

Changing unitary authority boundaries is important to all residents and businesses in York. Any change would impact on the focus of the council and how it provides services. In short, resources would be stretched over a wider geographic area with less emphasis on retaining and building on our unique character.

Cost

As York residents currently pay lower rates of Council Tax than neighbouring authorities, in any merger these rates would have to be equalised.

- If they were equalised higher than York's current levels, **York residents would pay more.**
- If they were equalised at York's current levels, this would create a budget gap, which would swallow any efficiencies, and over time, **York residents would pay more.**

In any merger scenario, York's residents would pay increased council tax to subsidise the more expensive service delivery in more rural areas.

Geography

There are two very distinct geographies in the county of North Yorkshire - largely urban York, and largely rural and coastal in surrounding districts. The economies are completely different. North Yorkshire County Council already carries out 80% (by spend) of service delivery in its area with successful and high-performing operating models that suits a dispersed population. The simplest transition would be for a unitary authority to cover that area, rather than complicate geographies by including York.

York has pockets of large inequalities. Enlarging York's footprint to cover distinctly different areas will reduce the focus on the key challenges for our own unique areas, reducing our connections to local community needs.

Efficiency

To build back better from Covid-19, the city needs stability at a local to efficiently invest resources in improving our future. At this point perhaps more than at any other time in the recent past, we need local government to be doing what it does best, with all available capacity directed to working with partners delivering services and supporting communities to create the conditions for inclusive, sustainable growth.

City of York Council is proud of the relationships built with the local businesses in the city and we are determined to continue supporting our distinctive local business community in adapting to the economic landscape post Covid-19. Therefore, we would want to avoid these relationships being diluted through the inclusion of rural and coastal economies which do not match with York's unique economic characteristics.

Furthermore, any disruption to children and adult social care services could negatively impact on the pace and range of services we deliver.

Any disruption will hinder the recovery, not support it.

We believe the benefits of collaboration and efficient joint working can be achieved between York and a new North Yorkshire Unitary, including as part of a Mayoral Combined Authority, rather than through unnecessary structural changes in York.

Timescales

The time for devolution is now. More complicated structural changes to local government in York will inevitably delay the achievement of devolution for York and North Yorkshire. That delay would impact directly on our residents and businesses, through delays in the investment that will support a strong recovery and strengthened economy.



The Council's position

Our council plan describes an ambitious vision for our city and reflects the views of our residents and partners.

We believe proposals that cause as little disruption as possible to allow councils to concentrate on serving their populations at this critical time are the right way forward. For this reason, the best way to support strong recovery, secure devolution quickly, and support the Levelling-Up agenda in York and North Yorkshire, is with City of York continuing as a unitary authority.



Building on effective collaboration

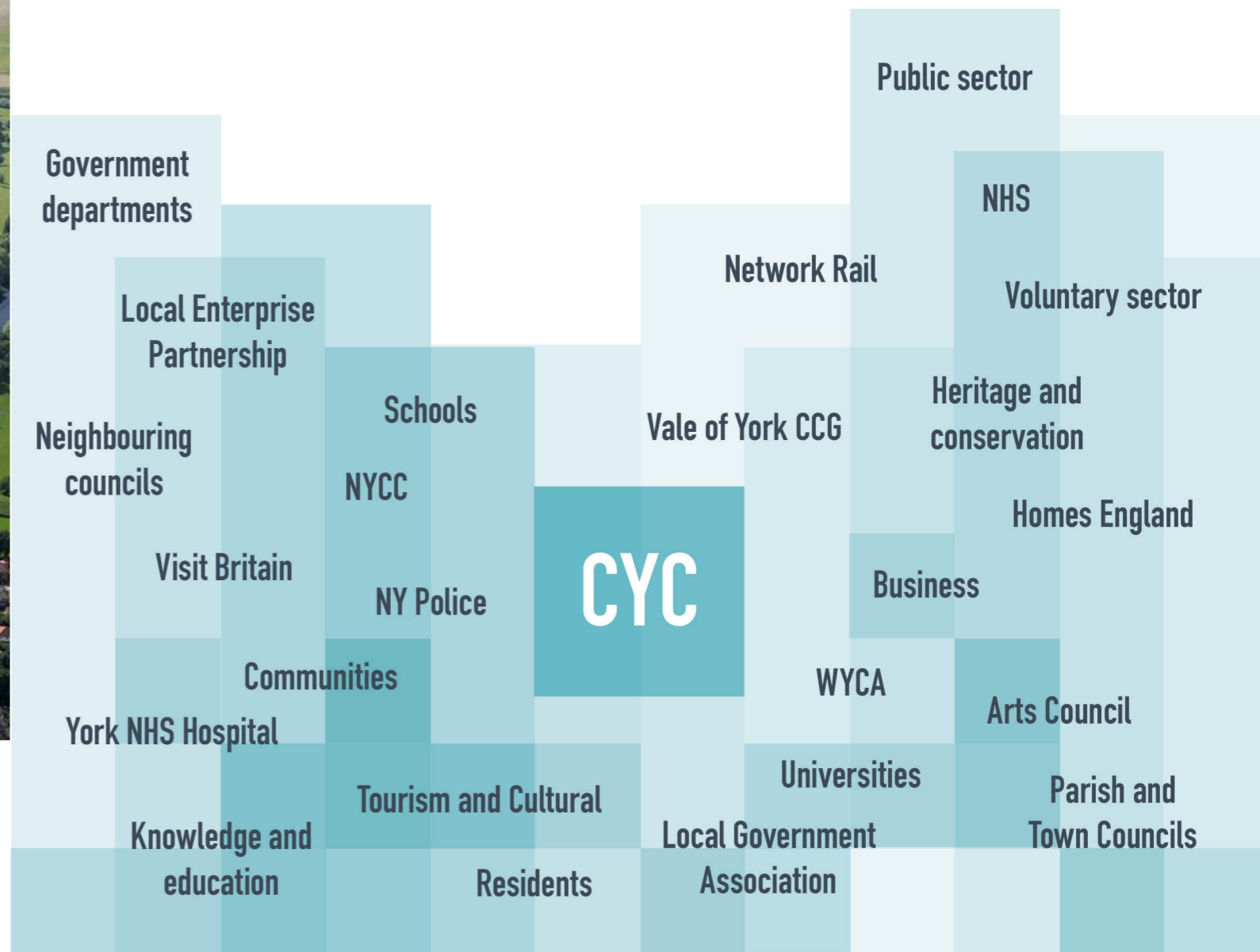
We are committed to work with a new North Yorkshire unitary council, collaborating to drive further efficiencies.

Our size gives us a unique strength for us to innovate and collaborate.

We work collaboratively and effectively with key partners inside and outside the city - neighbouring councils, the business community, the NHS, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Voluntary and Community sector and a wide range of other bodies and organisations that make up the complex organisational and structural fabric that supports the well-being of the city, its residents and businesses.

Our close, dynamic and effective working relationship with the York and North Yorkshire LEP reflects the importance of York to the wider economy across North Yorkshire and the interdependence that brings. We focus on York as a distinctly different type of place whilst being an integral asset at the regional level.

Building further on this collaboration, with a new unitary authority for North Yorkshire, provides the economies of scale whilst maintaining focus and identify for the distinctly different geographies of the area.



How you can help

| To make this investment in our city a reality, we need your help.

If you agree with us that York will benefit from these arrangements and investment then your support is welcome.

The government is currently considering various models. We believe by staying as a unitary authority and working with our colleagues in North Yorkshire we can drive economic growth in our region.

To help, please

- share our strengths – a partner pack will provide social media posts you can share or why not create your own about your own organisation
- show your support by writing a letter of support to Simon Clarke MP, Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government at 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF or by email to PSSimonClarke@communities.gov.uk
- share what makes York's size its strength, with your own networks (evidence published on <https://www.york.gov.uk/backyork>)

Consultation and Engagement

We are encouraging local residents, businesses and stakeholders to provide us their feedback on Local Government reorganisation and Devolution via Our Big Conversation (<https://www.york.gov.uk/OurBigConversation>), so we can include local views in our submission to the Government.

We will also be creating an offline survey on these topics, via a leaflet drop, to provide those without access to the internet the opportunity to have their say, so please do look out for the survey, which will land next month.