



# ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024



West & North  
Yorkshire Chamber  
of Commerce



# Constantly changing

**In a time of such rapid and often all-consuming change, the role of the Chamber of Commerce in supporting and aiding businesses has never been greater.**

**As all entrepreneurs know, the greatest challenges are those which come out of nowhere when least expected.**

**However, thanks to our region's extraordinarily high levels of resilience and determination, we can once again look back on a year of successes and innovation.**

**James Mason**  
**Chief Executive, West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce**

What makes the Chamber network unique is that we represent all employers, from both the private and the public sector, meaning we learn of the challenges and opportunities faced across the entirety of the region's economy. It is this network that allows the Chamber to influence and support the decision makers, both regionally and nationally so that the interests of employers are heard and understood. It is a network for which we are truly grateful. We are only as good as our membership and, fortunately for us, we represent the cream of Yorkshire business.

This year has seen our region flourish internationally. The post-Brexit world that businesses are navigating has meant our firms are in the hunt for new markets in which to trade their goods and services. Our international division has never been busier and there is no sign whatsoever that this pace of interest will slow any time soon.

We may have had a change in Government this past year but one thing that has not changed is our membership team's commitment to delivering first class services for those who support us. Our Supporter level of membership has very much come into its own and seen us diversify our already rich seam of members, representing all walks of commercial life.

Whether it is lunches, networking events or dinners, the Chamber continues to put on highly successful and sought-after events which inform and entertain those in attendance, as well as connecting them to new contacts and foster greater levels of transacting.

Our property network continues to deliver for the business and the team behind this portfolio are often the unsung heroes of the business.

Our representation and policy team continue to make sure that the voice of our membership is heard by those who need to hear it the most, and that the work we do receives the maximum amount of exposure.

I must at this stage pay tribute to the incredible contributions of our board, chaired so expertly by Amanda Beresford. The guidance and knowledge they supply us as a business with is extraordinary and we are very grateful to have them.

I must also place on record our gratitude to our presidents and vice presidents. Mark Cowgill and Rebecca Fitzgerald (Bradford president and vice president), Chris Black and Aqila Choudhry (Leeds president and vice president) and Sarah Czarnecki (York & North Yorkshire president) represent the best of Yorkshire business. Their leadership is invaluable, and I am sure everyone reading this will agree that the region is so much the better for having them. All are now one year into their two-year terms and I cannot wait to see what they achieve in the months ahead.

Finally, I wish to thank all of our members without we would not exist. We will continue to work tirelessly to serve you and the region we all love and call home.



**Amanda Beresford**  
**Chair of West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce**

Our economy has had an eventful 12 months to say the least. The reality for businesses is that trading remains challenging. It is close to a year since war broke out in the Middle East and the conflict in Ukraine is now into its third year.

However, that is not to say that it is all doom and gloom. We are businesspeople and businesspeople always find opportunities, no matter the climate. And as a region and as a Chamber, we have enjoyed success and have much to look forward to.

To get both the elected mayor and the combined authority off to the best possible start, our York and North Yorkshire president Sarah Czarnecki initiated the Devolution Alliance, a summary of the region's economic strengths and opportunities. This was well-received in the region and by the media.

In Bradford, the countdown to City of Culture is very much live. And with the help of the Chamber's lobbying, Bradford looks likely to get the new through railway station it deserves. And once you factor in Bradford Live, the Darley Street Market and the exciting urban regeneration projects, Bradford looks set for an exciting new chapter in its history.

In Leeds we continue to see notable successes for our business community. We have welcomed the National Infrastructure Commission to the city along with an expansion of the Bank of England's offices.

The Chamber has been consulted about a number of issues in the city including updates to the Local Plan and continues to work with all of its institutions to make the region a better place.

West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce is the only Chamber nationally to have a BAME committee and this group has made a number of powerful interventions in the last 12 months.

Our two Local Skills Improvement Plans are functioning well in both West and North Yorkshire and the relationship between our business communities and learning providers has never been stronger.

Here's to the year ahead, and here's hoping for some improved levels of stability.



**Chris Black**  
**President of Leeds Chamber of Commerce**

It was a great honour to be elected Leeds Chamber president last year. I have been involved with the Chamber for many years and know just how important an institution it is.

Whether it is providing first class advice, championing our city's strengths, lobbying to promote our interests or bringing people together, the Chamber is a vital part of the city's fabric and helps ensure that Leeds remains one of the best cities to live, work and do business on the planet.

As a proud Leeds lad, a manufacturer and an exporter, it is a matter of great pride that the goods we produce are used all over the world.

As a Chamber, it is also important that we celebrate what we do here in Leeds as a business community. As a manufacturer I know that the city of Leeds produces incredible things in the factories around the city. There are so many fantastic opportunities for people of all ages in manufacturing. With the Leeds Manufacturing Festival, we celebrated our successes and tried to ensure that young people see this sector for the career potential it has, offering well-paid, exciting, fulfilling and exciting opportunities in the workplace.

But as a city, Leeds has it all and represents the UK economy in one destination. Financial and professional services, tech, property development, food and drink, hospitality - we have got it all here and we are first class in every department.

Our universities bring in the finest minds from across the planet. And thanks to Channel 4 news's relocation, we have a nightly national presence on the airwaves.

We have much to be proud of but also much work still today. The scrapping of HS2 was a bitter blow for us following years of warm words and promises. As a chamber we continue to press for the transport connectivity we need to raise our productivity and attract inward investment.

With our newly-pedestrianised City Square, a rapidly expanding city centre and increasingly prosperous suburban-based business sector, Leeds remains one of the best places to live and work in Britain.

Here's to another successful year for our city.





**Mark Cowgill**  
**President of Bradford Chamber of Commerce.**

I have been involved in business in Bradford for many years and am passionate about this city, its economy and, of course, its people.

Bradford is now set to take to the national stage.

In just a few short months, Bradford will become UK City of Culture, a massive endorsement of this city's values, standing and importance.

In preparation for this momentous showcase, the city is undergoing a significant transformation programme, one that will create more green space and involve less traffic and create a modern 21st century city centre.

The opening of One City Park was a significant milestone in this process, creating world-class office that will see PwC as its anchor tenant. The Darley Street market will provide a superb focal point for the city.

Bradford Chamber will continue to champion its members and lobby and campaign on what it needs as a city.

We saw this in full effect late last year when Rail Minister Huw Merriman confirmed that Bradford is, at long last, to get a new railway station. This follows years of campaigning by the Chamber and will see a proper, through railways station delivered for Bradford to link it to the other great cities of the North.

It truly is exciting times. We at the Chamber welcome all of these developments with open arms and urge everyone to embrace this positive momentum going forward.

As I enter my second and final year as Chamber president, I pay tribute to the city's business community, our chamber network and my vice president Rebecca Fitzgerald, who will serve as an outstanding Chamber president when her time comes.



**Sarah Czarnecki**  
**President of York & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce**

It was a great honour to be elected president of the Chamber, and I am grateful, not only for the opportunities it brings, but to serve this region's magnificent business community and champion it to the world.

One of the things I am proudest of during my first few months as president has been the work we did ahead of the mayoral election. We as a Chamber, alongside York St John University and the University of York, came together to form the Devolution Alliance, a body aimed with gathering key insights about our region's economic strengths, challenges and opportunities.

This was a massive piece of work, but it meant that, whoever was elected as mayor, could be handed a document on Day One that would give them the framework for economic policy.

The report's authors spoke to 12 of the region's key sectors, from heritage to hospitality to creatives to tech and emerged with cross-cutting recommendations for what York and North Yorkshire needs. These include improving inward investment into the region, upgrading the region's transport infrastructure and ensuring more accountability in the region.

We as a Chamber stand ready to work with the mayor and his team to make these priorities a reality. York is super at so many things and just one of these is its service to the transport industry. Whether it is railways, hotels, airports, gothic cathedrals or our world-class hospitality sector, there are a million reasons to visit and do business in York and this is why people each year travel from all over the world to visit us.

I love working in business and have been lucky enough to have had a wonderful and diverse career here in York and North Yorkshire.

Here in York, we are blessed with first class creative industries, doing work which is grabbing headlines and attention all around the world. Our higher education sector is producing graduates who are going on to change the world. And our heritage sector does a wonderful job as custodians of York's incredible history, a history that stretches back thousands of years. And, when it comes to hospitality, who does it better than North Yorkshire.

I thank everyone in the Chamber network and look forward to another successful 12 months in the coming year.



## REPRESENTATION

### *Devolution*

Our York and North Yorkshire president Sarah Czarnecki initiated the Devolution Alliance, a summary of the region's economic strengths and opportunities. This was well-received in the region and by the media upon its launch in December.

### *Economy*

Finally, our Quarterly Economic Survey remains the most respected barometer of business sentiment in the region and is poured over by leading decision makers in both the public and private sector.

Surveying everything from investment plans, sales and profit expectations, it provides a comprehensive picture of economic activity in the region.

It is perhaps tribute to the resilience of Yorkshire's business community that, despite the uncertainty and shockwaves felt across the world, employers have remained broadly optimistic over the past 12 months.

### *Hospitality*

On hospitality, our partners across the whole of North Yorkshire continue to make progress, with an aim of producing a charter for the sector hopefully due to be realised by the end of the year.

Our thanks to our chair Andrew Pericleous and his vice chair Rob Lazenby for their expertise and leadership.

### *Transport and Infrastructure*

Again, with the help of the Chamber's lobbying, Bradford looks likely to get the new through railway station it deserves, with members of the policy team having lobbied rail minister Huw Merriman on this very matter. An exploratory study was commissioned shortly thereafter.

The Chamber has been consulted about a number of issues in the city including updates to the Local Plan and continues to work with all of its institutions to make the region a better place.

We have also worked with planning chiefs at our local authorities to ensure both council officers and developers are aware of the best path to success when it comes to delivering projects.



## Media and Profile

Our policy groups have welcomed presentations and inputs from some of the nation's leading figures in the worlds of policy and economics.

We have also seen the Chamber attract a considerable amount of media attention, both regionally and nationally.

Membership in North Yorkshire were quoted in a piece by The Times's technology editor Katie Prescott on a piece about the ten Prime Minister's Rishi Sunak's relationship with business.

The Chamber now has a regular column in The Yorkshire Post, highlighting issues of interest to its membership on everything from the dualling of the A64, to technology in the hospitality sector to skills needs for manufacturers. Our Policy team is frequently called upon to speak to media on key issues of the day.

## MARKETING

Over the last 12 months, the West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce has seen further levels of organic growth across our social media platforms. Attracting a total of 433 new followers on the main X profile (formerly Twitter), we've managed to maintain our total following of 12,074. This compares with 1807 new followers on LinkedIn over the same duration, giving us a sharp spike in growth of 5831 followers in total. Engagement on LinkedIn alone has seen 442,873 impressions over the past year, with 30,683 clicks too. As membership numbers have grown, so too have the number of posts on our social media channels, sharing various member articles, offers and opportunities with our network. We've published an impressive 571 member articles on the website, providing exclusive exposure for our members, which is a 90% increase.

### Events

Netwalking has developed over the last year and is now our most popular event. Our Annual Dinners continue to be more inclusive and offer a less formal approach while delivering an evening of entertainment and business discussions. We have developed event partnerships with members, one of the most successful was a Business Expo with the RFCA and Bradford Bulls. In December, we launched the Festive Lunch, a celebration of our successes which was well attended and will be on the calendar for next year. We have seen an increase in event bookings across the board and our online Bitesize boardrooms continue to be a success.



## CHAMBER INTERNATIONAL

Chamber International issued 12,790 trade documents, with an export shipment value of £1,392,381,256. In addition, 71 export and import workshops, we successfully delivered training 308 delegates. A significant number of website enquiries were received, and 153 new companies registered for the Chamber's online trade documentation platform (eCert). Chamber International has 25,303 followers on X (formerly Twitter), 47,000 contacts on our client database and 6139 LinkedIn followers.

## BUSINESS SERVICES

The West and North Yorkshire Chamber continue the delivery of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) in West and North Yorkshire.

## MEMBERSHIP

Overall membership has increased, with the new Supporter membership generating 226 sign-ups alone over the last year. Funding has continued to offer businesses support towards membership, with a total of £80k being accessed for Chamber membership. This year the retention rate was consistently 3% higher than the British Chamber's benchmark rate.

## PROPERTY

The Chamber's Property team has helped eleven businesses develop and grow within the Chamber's portfolio or help them move on to their own premises, and 21 businesses have been provided with virtual office support. Occupancy stayed high due to the quality of the commercial space on offer.

The 119 offices and workshops across the four sites have provided a home for 92 businesses across Bradford, providing employment for 375 people. The new hybrid workshop units at Bradford Chamber Business Park have remained fully let and the refurbished office space at Chamber Hub has provided high quality serviced space for 10 businesses.

CHAMBER  
PATRONS



ARUP

drax

Teesside  
International  
Airport



sky **betting & gaming**



First