



ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025



West & North
Yorkshire Chamber
of Commerce

Your Chamber

**Here to connect support
and represent business**



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of Commerce



James Mason Chief Executive

Over the past year, the West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce has strengthened its international profile, advanced regional collaborations, and delivered real impact for members. A trade mission to the UAE opened new markets for businesses and showcased what West and North Yorkshire have to offer the rest of the world.

Locally, the Chamber established a Planning Protocol with the City of York Council to streamline development and supported major regeneration projects in Bradford during its year as the UK City of Culture. In Leeds, the Chamber played a key role in the city's economic growth, including welcoming the National Wealth Fund and the Bank of England offices. Our leadership of two Local Skills Improvement Plans across West and North Yorkshire has further aligned training provision with employer needs, ensuring a stronger pipeline of skills for priority sectors across the region.

These achievements were made possible through the advocacy of our Presidents—Chris Black in Leeds, Mark Cowgill in Bradford, and Sarah Czarnecki in York & North Yorkshire—all have championed business interests locally, nationally, and internationally, and I thank them for their outstanding leadership, commitment, and dedication throughout their tenure, which has ensured that the Chamber continues to be a strong and effective voice for our business community. Together with our members, we have delivered a year of progress, resilience, and opportunity, and we look forward to building on this momentum in the year ahead.



Amanda Beresford

Chair of the Board

Despite the numerous challenges facing our economy, we as Chamber of Commerce can reflect on a successful 12 months. Since our last annual report, we have been taking the chamber to the world.

Two highly successful trade missions, one to New York City in May and one to Dubai in February, saw our members forging links for new international partners.

The former trip to New York City was organised in conjunction with York Minster, who were transporting a ledger stone to St Thomas Church in Manhattan, repaying the favour bestowed upon York in 1923 when the city's then mayor sent a plaque commemorating the historic links between the two cities.

Both of these trade missions were member driven and a third, this time to Saudi Arabia, is being arranged for this year.

Staying with York, in the last year we have established a planning protocol with City of York Council. This work, led by our York & North Yorkshire Property and Economic Forum chair Steve Secker, will mean development will be significantly easier going forward, a welcome boost to the city.

We also as a Chamber successfully lobbied for two of our members, Pavers and Helmsley Group, to make the case for their development plans.

Moving to Bradford, its year as UK City of Culture is very much alive. The Chamber has a strategic partnership with BD25 to connect the city's business community to its cultural assets. We continue to champion its regeneration and the openings of both Bradford Live and Darley Street Market this year will significantly enhance the city's economy and reputation.

In Leeds we continue to bear witness to a growing economy. We have welcomed the National Wealth Fund to the city along with an expansion of the Bank of England's offices, which will soon employ more than 500 people. The Chamber has been consulted about a number of issues in the city including updates to the Local Plan and continues to work with its institutions to make the region a better place.

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.

Our thanks to our three fantastic presidents Sarah Czarnecki, Mark Cowgill and Chris Black for the amazing advocacy they provide for our region and to all of our members who we exist to serve. Here's to a prosperous year ahead.



Chris Black

Leeds President

It has been a huge honour to serve as the president of Leeds Chamber of Commerce over the past two years.

As someone who was born and bred and runs a family business in Leeds, I cannot champion our city enough. As both a manufacturer and an exporter I am proud to fly the flag for Leeds manufactured products around the globe.

Leeds is a city which has been producing top quality goods and services for hundreds of years and this is where the Chamber excels, working tirelessly to protect and enhance the businesses that produce this fine work.

The Chamber provides first class advice, champions our city's strengths and lobbies to promote our interests both nationally and internationally. Most important of all, it brings people together, making it an integral part of the city's development and future.

Manufacturing runs in my blood and in the blood of my family. I will always champion the sector because I know only too well the fantastic opportunities it can bring. It is a profession that has taken me, our products and brand all over the world. As such I have been and remain an enthusiastic supporter of the Leeds Manufacturing Festival, an organisation charged with ensuring that young people see this sector for the career potential it has, offering well-paid, fulfilling and exciting opportunities.

As I have said many times before, 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.

This past year has been one of change, with numerous changes having been made to the top of the council. We pay tribute to those who have moved on to fresh challenges and warmly welcome those who have replaced them.

We continue to support West Yorkshire Combined Authority in its plans to deliver mass transit in the region and we continue to champion, campaign and represent our members, locally, nationally and internationally.

Thank you to all of our members, whom we are honoured to serve.



Mark Cowgill Bradford President

As a proud Bradfordian I consider myself a very fortunate person to have been president of Bradford Chamber of Commerce this past two years.

In particular to have been president during Bradford's richly deserved tenure as UK City of Culture has been a deep personal honour and I have been incredibly proud of how the whole city has risen to the challenge of showcasing what a dynamic, exciting and outstanding city Bradford is.

Who will ever forget the spectacle of tens of thousands of people flooding into City Park for the City of Culture launch event? The event spread over two nights was an unmitigated triumph and a real encapsulation of what Bradford truly is.

It really feels like Bradford is a city on the rise at present. Bradford Live and Darley Street Market are both on track to open their doors this year, giving our city centre two enormous draws that we have been crying out for for so long. The newly reopened Science Museum too means one of our greatest cultural assets just got even greater.

The regeneration of the city centre generally, be it the pedestrianisation of Hall Ings and greening of Norfolk Gardens, the revamp of Market Street and Bridge Street and the continued success of City Park are transforming Bradford for the better. And the ambitious plans for City Village remain on track.

Connectivity remains an issue for Bradford and we remain one of the poorest connected cities in Britain. But work is underway to address this, with a feasibility study underway to give Bradford a through station to connect us to the other great cities of the North is underway.

Through all of this, the Chamber has been heavily involved, working with our key stakeholders at local and national level to deliver for the city's businesses and residents.

Let us keep this fantastic forward momentum going in the coming years. There can be no limit to what we achieve if we work together.

Thank you to all our members for your support these past two years. I will never forget my time as president.



Sarah Czarnecki York & North Yorkshire President

I have been honoured to serve as the President of York and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce through the changing landscape from these last two years.

When David Skaith was elected as Mayor of York and North Yorkshire, I made it clear that success for the mayoralty will require proactive collaboration between the business community and public sector.

When he attended our Leadership Group meeting in September 2024, members posed questions about his commitments to transport, infrastructure and to helping the almost 70,000 businesses that call York and North Yorkshire home. Our collaboration so far has been positive, and it has been clear that businesses, economic growth and creating better communities have been a priority. We look forward to seeing our partnership develop further.

Our Chamber also put York and North Yorkshire on the map internationally. Our trade mission to New York was a huge success and brought businesses across the region together to collaborate with the United States.

The trip marked a new direction for the Chamber, from hosting a mini "Great Yorkshire Show" at the British Consulate General to attending the service at St Thomas' Church in Manhattan to celebrate the return gift of a leger stone from York Minster. The success of this trip for members has resulted in members collaborating on tourist opportunities and looking further afield at opening new trade markets.

The opportunity for development and investment in the region is ripe, with innovators like McLaren Regeneration and Helmsley Group paving the way for a city balancing the old and the new.

At the start of 2025, our Planning Protocol, led by Chair of York Property and Economic Forum Steve Secker, was released after a year of collaboration with City of York Council. It lays out expectations for both the Council and developers in the planning process and demonstrates our commitment to working across sectors for the good of the city and region.

York is a city I am proud to have built my career in, and I am now helping the next generation provide fresh ideas to business challenges through my role as Director of the Business Clinic at York St John University.

It has been a pleasure to represent the diverse membership of the Chamber, and I thank them for their support during my time as President.



Representation

Planning

The Chamber struck a landmark agreement with City of York Council in a move that will make development far more effective in the city.

Delivered in partnership with City of York Council, a new Planning Protocol sets out the expectations of service and communications from both developers and council officers throughout the planning application process.

The Protocol is a code of conduct that will ultimately lead to increased economic growth in the city.

Chancellor

Just days after delivering her controversial first Budget as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves met with Chamber members in Leeds.

A range of matters were discussed, including plans for growth, the Budget, issues in the care sector, manufacturing and international trade opportunities, infrastructure and how Yorkshire can be a key catalyst for the wider economy.

Around the table was Victoria Wainwright from Azets, Adam Brickell from Flutter, Leeds vice president Aqila Choudhry from Love in Care, Amanda Beresford from Schoefield Sweeney and Leeds president Chris Black from Sound Leisure, as well as Chamber CEO James Mason and head of policy Mark Casci.

Development

Two serious development projects in the region have been given the green light, thanks to lobbying activity from the Chamber.

City of York Council has approved plans for to expand Pavers factory in York, a move that will create hundreds of jobs and generate an estimated £51m for the region's economy.

Separately, ambitious plans from the Helmsley Group to regenerate 250,000 sq ft of the city's historic Coney Street were also approved by the council, a move which create a raft of retail, leisure, commercial and residential spaces - including a riverside walkway and student accommodation.

Research claims the plan will deliver £175m in economic benefits to York over the next 15 years.

The Chamber lobbied heavily, both in person and through the media, for these applications to be approved, a reminder of the powerful voice the Chamber has.

Hustings

Ahead of the two mayoral elections in May, the Chamber helped organise two successful hustings events in both West and North Yorkshire.

More than 200 people attended the two events at York St John University and KMPG's Leeds office respectively.

Tamsin O'Brien from Harrogate publication Stray Ferret hosted the North Yorkshire event while The Yorkshire Post's Greg Wright hosted the West Yorkshire event.

Ambassadorial

The Chamber hosted the German Ambassador to the United Kingdom during a visit to Leeds.

Miguel Berger was hosted by our Leeds Chamber president Chris Black at the premises of his business Sound Leisure, a global exporter of jukeboxes.

Mr Berger's visit came just days after Prime Minister Keir Starmer met with the then German Chancellor Olaf Sholz, marking the start of a reset of relations between the two countries. Topics under discussion included manufacturing, skill shortages and opportunities from devolution.

Economy

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 sectors.

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.

Cultural

The Chamber struck a strategic partnership with Bradford 2025 City of Culture.

The deal will see the Chamber connecting the city's cultural and economic communities to help businesses share in the glory of this once in a lifetime event.

Bradford's being the UK's City of Culture for 2025 will see more than 10 million people visit the city and generate an estimated £100 million worth of economic activity.

Media and Profile

The Chamber has enjoyed an extensive amount of media coverage, regionally, nationally and internationally.

The day after the UK General Election our Leeds vice president Aqila Choudhry was interviewed on BBC 10 o'clock News in front of an audience of circa 3.5 million.

Our members have been quoted in national newspapers such as The Times. We are frequently quoted in or appear on local media.

Much of this comes from the Chamber's proactivity, having issued 67 press release during the financial year.

The Chamber's trade visits have also drawn the attention of international media, with publications in Sri Lanka and Kenya having mentioned its work and outreach.



Marketing

A monumental year being recognised as one of the top five Chambers in the BCC network at the Chamber of the Year Awards. We have extended our profile through several successful trade missions to the United Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Dubai & Abu Dhabi. These missions have provided a platform for Yorkshire businesses to forge new connections and grow their export markets by meeting targeted businesses and individuals in key global locations.

Other events such as the Great Yorkshire Show, have also given us the opportunity to expand our reach and develop our profile.

The quarterly Yorkshire Business magazine continues to showcase the work of our organisation too, highlighting key projects that the Chamber has been involved in, whilst spotlighting the work of our members.

Digital Growth

During the last 12 months, we have seen increased levels of organic growth across our social media platforms. Whilst X has seen 536 new followers on our main @wnychamber profile, LinkedIn has gained 2,578 new followers in the same timeframe which compares to 1,807 in last year's report. Combined with 110 new followers on Instagram, and 66 new followers on Facebook, this gives us a combined total of 3,290 new followers over the past year.

Online interaction has remained positive, with an average 10.8% engagement rate on LinkedIn over the past twelve months, and 10,368 reactions to our posts on this platform. To put our exposure into perspective, LinkedIn has accumulated 337,191 impressions this year, compared to 252,458 impressions on X. Our reach expands across email marketing campaigns too, with a total of 620,373 emails sent out in 2024/25. Achieving an average open rate of 97.92% across the year, this has led to a total of 45,074 clicks through email marketing.

The Chamber website has evolved too, experiencing 40,766 website users. As traffic increases digitally, we have also seen an impressive spike in the number of press releases published. Sharing 964 articles over the past twelve months, this exceeds the 571 articles published in 2023/24 which was already a huge jump from the previous year. This continued exposure for our members can only be a good thing for the wider business community and for SMEs in particular who are looking to build their brand across the West & North Yorkshire region.

Finally, the Chamber has relished further video content being shared across social media channels. With a growing number of videos being shared on YouTube, we look ahead to utilising these marketing materials more effectively on social media to expand our reach and draw attention to the fantastic events/networking opportunities, as well as highlighting the many benefits of joining Chamber membership.



Events

This year has seen a range of sell-out events across the West & North Yorkshire region. With no events being cancelled over the past twelve months, the Chamber has given business representatives ample opportunity to network and develop new connections.

A key event was the successful trade mission to the UAE, which saw eight events held over four consecutive days. The Chamber received some fantastic feedback from those who joined us on this trip and the wider business community too. We also hosted a joint exhibition with the RFCA.

Aside from attending key events such as the Great Yorkshire Show, the Chamber has made a conscious effort to expand its reach with further events held on the east coast and the outskirts of Bradford, as we look to build our membership numbers. Our Annual Dinner events have again shown the success of connecting business professionals, whilst celebrating regional achievements and highlighting the impact of the Chamber and its strong relationships with local authorities and entrepreneurs.

Membership

We have seen a 4.5% reduction in membership resignations throughout the past twelve months, meaning our retention rate has risen to 91%. The West & North Yorkshire Chamber has also experienced a 10% increase in the number of Executive members, and a further 25% increase in the number of Patrons. The £80,000 membership funding that was available has assisted 317 local businesses in total. Meanwhile, Supporter membership has grown by a further 963 sign-ups since April 2024.



Chamber International

During FY24/25, Chamber International issued nearly £12.5k trade documents, with an export shipment value close to £580k.

In the summer of 2024, we announced a new partnership with Exemplas to deliver a new export support program for businesses – West Yorkshire Business Boost. Funded by West Yorkshire Combined Authority, this programme is currently helping SMEs to develop clear export action plans, and providing them with masterclass events, each focussed on a specific high-potential overseas market.

We ran a fourth season of the Export Trade Accelerator programme – an extensive international trade course comprising 6 taught modules, peer support and professional mentoring.

Altogether, we successfully delivered 87 workshops and other events focussed on import and export, training 395 delegates in total.

We received 744 web enquiries, and 151 new companies registered for the Chamber's online trade documentation platform (eCert).

This year we supported two exciting trade missions for businesses from the region – one to Kenya, the other to the UAE.

Chamber International's combined team has 6.4k LinkedIn followers and 25k followers on X. Our email contact list includes 50k named professionals working in international trade. Page views on our dedicated website increased, and we had 22.2k video views on YouTube.

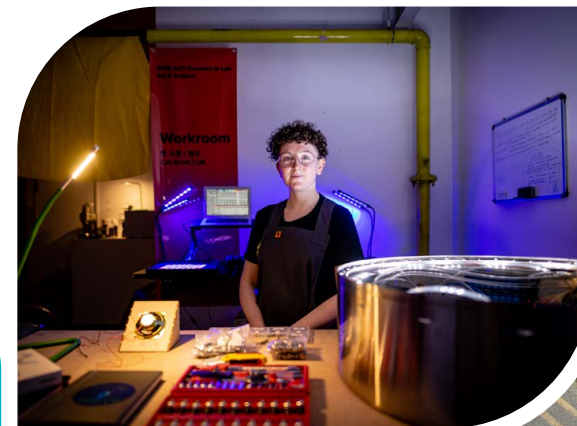
Property

In terms of performance all sites have maintained consistently high occupancy rates throughout the year. The Business Park along with Commerce Court and City Hub have never dropped below 90% occupied. This is due to the high quality of the space on offer, as well as the flexibility that the Chamber offers its tenants. The monthly rolling notice period and having Chamber membership included with occupancy are a fantastic USP.

We currently have 57 different workshop tenants, along with 45 different companies occupying our offices around the sites. We also have 23 virtual office tenants. The offer we have continues to be very appealing to small/medium size businesses across the Bradford area.

After 28 years working at The Chamber, Andrew Robertson took the decision to retire at the end of June 2024. Tom Harrowell, his 2nd in command, took on the role of Head of Property. Initially on a 6-month acting up basis, Tom was confirmed in the role as of January 2025.

We continue to invest in our sites where possible. Which shows our tenants that we care about providing them with the best working environment possible.



Business Services

We continue to deliver Innovate UK Business Growth support as part of a wider national consortium of partners, with a dedicated team of Innovation Growth Specialists helping businesses identify and exploit their innovation, by providing tailored support to help understand how to maximise potential in order to grow and scale.

We deliver on Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP's) across West & North Yorkshire, aligning post-16 education and training with the most urgent needs of the local businesses, with the goal to stimulate local economic growth by making the local workforce more employable, giving people the skills they need to get the available jobs.

CHAMBER
PATRONS



Uber



drax



ARUP



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