



PROJECT ROME

# NORTHERN AGENDA

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## Editorial

**Even the most optimistic champion of the Northern Powerhouse and regional devolution would not have been expecting any game-changing announcements in the Chancellor's recent Budget speech.**

Nevertheless, the prevailing reaction to the Budget amongst Northern politicians was disappointment that yet another opportunity has been lost to reinvigorate both the Northern Powerhouse Strategy and the regional devolution agenda.

The Chancellor's spending promises on the Northern Powerhouse amounted to little more than small pots of development money for pilot programmes and the North's share of national spending commitments. Even the increase in the Transforming Cities Fund benefits the six areas that have existing Metro Mayors, including Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region, more than other City Regions, who must enter a competitive bidding process in the hope of securing funds.



**The Government needs to become much more committed to the Northern Powerhouse or stop talking about it**

**- Lord Jim O'Neill**

Asked to clarify the section on the Northern Powerhouse after the Budget speech, Treasury officials merely said the Northern Powerhouse Strategy was to be “refreshed” next year. Former Treasury Minister Lord Jim O’Neill, one of the architects of the Northern Powerhouse project said the Government “needs to become much more committed to the Northern Powerhouse or stop talking about it”. It was a sentiment echoed by one veteran commentator who told Northern Agenda, “It was a budget that pretty much ignored the specific needs of the North. Brexit is all consuming in Whitehall and no one else is getting a look in.”

The same criticism has been levelled at the Government over its refusal to meet with Yorkshire local authority leaders to discuss a possible timetable for a Yorkshire devolution deal. Yorkshire leaders wrote to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary James Brokenshire in September setting out the economic case for a One Yorkshire deal. However, it has been revealed that the Government has not even acknowledged or responded to their

request for a meeting. One Yorkshire local authority leader told Northern Agenda, “We sent the Government a 124-page report on the rationale for devolving power to Yorkshire, as well as a request for a meeting to discuss the report. We haven’t even had an acknowledgement. It seems that Brexit has taken up the entire bandwidth of Government and the rest of us are being ignored. There is real anger amongst Yorkshire leaders.”

An apparent lack of government interest is not the only problem the One Yorkshire campaign is facing, as the cross-party coalition in support of a Yorkshire-wide deal appears to be displaying the most serious fractures since the campaign launched in 2016; and the fault lines are not appearing along party political lines.



**Lord Jim O'Neill**



**James Brokenshire**



**Kevin Hollinrake**



**Clive Betts**



**John Healey**



**Paul Blomfield**

Thirsk and Malton’s Conservative MP, Kevin Hollinrake has long been an opponent on One Yorkshire and has been working behind the scenes to persuade his parliamentary and local government Conservative colleagues to back a City Region Mayoral model.

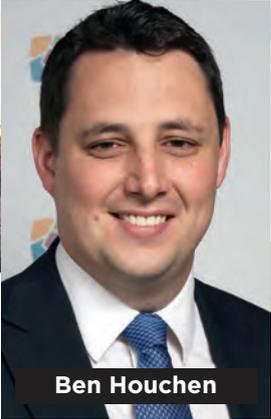
A recent survey of Yorkshire MPs indicates that his efforts may be having an effect. A majority of Conservative MPs in the region either oppose One Yorkshire or are ambivalent about it. Only 2 Yorkshire Conservative MPs support the Yorkshire-wide model.

It appears that Kevin Hollinrake has now found allies across the political divide, recently penning a joint article with Sheffield South East Labour MP Clive Betts supporting four City Region Mayors for Yorkshire. Labour’s shadow local government spokesperson, South Yorkshire MP John Healey also recently expressed his opposition to the One Yorkshire deal, as did Sheffield Central MP Paul Blomfield. It is significant that most of the Labour opposition to a One Yorkshire deal is coming from South Yorkshire, which already has a Metro Mayor, Dan Jarvis; albeit one denied any significant powers until the nascent South Yorkshire devolution deal is signed.

A key One Yorkshire insider told Northern Agenda, “Whilst local authority leaders have remained steadfast in their support for One Yorkshire, the region’s MPs have been more ambivalent. Whilst most Labour MPs say they support One Yorkshire their support appears to be skin deep. We need much more of a commitment from more of them.”



**Dan Jarvis**



**Ben Houchen**



**Susan Hinchcliffe**



**Judith Blake**



**Carl Les**

However, the One Yorkshire campaign retains the support of 18 of the region's 20 local authorities – Sheffield and Rotherham being the exceptions – including all of the Conservative-led authorities in North and East Yorkshire. Indeed, they have often been the most vociferous in their support for a One Yorkshire model. The campaign also received an unexpected recent boost when Conservative Tees Valley Metro Mayor Ben Houchen threw his weight behind a single Mayor for his neighbouring county. However, in view of seeming government intransigence on the matter such cross-party support may not be enough.

The devolution deadlock in Yorkshire needs breaking but it is unclear how this will come about. Whilst highly regarded local authority leaders like Judith Blake (Leeds City Council), Susan Hinchcliffe (Bradford Council) and Carl Les (North Yorkshire County Council) continue to work hard behind the scenes to find a way through the impasse, there is some concern about a lack of leadership in the One Yorkshire campaign.

One devolution campaigner told Northern Agenda, "There's a lack of heavyweight political and civic leadership compared to

Manchester in the run up to their devolution deal. They had the dream team of Sir Richard Leese [Leader of Manchester City Council] and Sir Howard Bernstein [former Chief Executive, Manchester City Council] driving the devolution agenda for a decade. Yorkshire hasn't yet got the same, although Judith Blake is respected within government and with a bit more support she might be able to get a deal done."

However, others are less optimistic. Another insider told Northern Agenda, "Judith is good but lacks support across the board. Quite frankly Dan Jarvis has been a massive let down in terms of his leadership of the devolution campaign. Having said that, we could have Winston Churchill leading our campaign and the Government still wouldn't listen."

As we go to press Channel 4 has announced that Leeds will be the site for their new headquarters, beating off competition from Greater Manchester and Birmingham. It's a move that will boost Judith Blake's personal standing and help Yorkshire in their quest for progress on devolution.

