



ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023



West & North
Yorkshire Chamber
of Commerce



Onwards & upwards

It is a great honour to be the Chief Executive of the West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce and over the last twelve months I have been proud to be part of an internal team and wider network of committed individuals supporting the regional economy during very challenging times.

James Mason
Chief Executive, West & North Yorkshire Chamber



Whilst Chambers of Commerce across the UK and world act to 'Represent, Support and Connect' businesses, we are not impervious, as an organisation, to the ever-changing political and economic conditions that businesses face. Having been involved in running businesses for many years, one thing is for certain: things rarely ever go to plan and the back-to-back crises of Covid-19, the war in Ukraine, the spiralling costs of living and rising inflation have meant we have all had to change budgets, business plans and strategies on an almost monthly basis. However, it is often during these difficult times when Chambers of Commerce come into their own. We occupy a unique position straddling the private and public sector with our role being to listen to the problems and opportunities that businesses are facing and find ways with policy makers and stakeholders to make things easier for organisations to thrive and survive.

Any business is, of course, only as good as the people that work within it and the network of supporters that surround it. In our case, this is our clients, customers, suppliers and partners. In this last year, the word 'Supporter' has been a key one for us as we launched a new tier of membership that comes with no cost to the member. Our 'Chamber Supporter' offer allows businesses that are unfamiliar with Chamber services to become part of our network and engage with surveys, online events and benefit from our newsletters and digital output. Much like supporting a sports team, these individuals believe in what we do and add to a wider communication to amplify our messages even if they can't take full use of our paid for services. In saying this, our official memberships offer the best value and we have been delighted to maintain one of the best retention rates of existing members across the UK Chamber network. Add to this a host of new Executive and Patron members including Adams Food Services, ARUP, Teesside Airport and Insurance giant PIB, we are pleased that businesses of all sizes continue to see the value of what we do.

As always, each year we welcome new additions to our three Leadership Groups across York & North Yorkshire, Leeds and Bradford and I must place on record a special thanks to our Chair Amanda Beresford and the Board for their support and guidance over the last twelve months, not to mention the leadership of our three Presidents that have led their respective Chambers with pride. These individuals represent the very best traits of the business communities in York & North Yorkshire (Laurence Beardmore), Bradford (Victoria Wainwright) and Leeds (Mike Briffett). All three enjoyed fantastic annual dinners with a modern twist and long may these events continue as we celebrate the successes of our unique part of the world.

We will welcome new Presidents Sarah Czarnecki (York & North Yorkshire), Mark Cowgill (Bradford) and Chris Black (Leeds) as well as new Board members Aqila Choudhry, Rebecca Fitzgerald, Kerry Hope and Scott Jenkins but we also had to say farewell to long standing Board member Nick Garthwaite following retirement and, with deep sadness, to Andrew Digwood, the former York & North Yorkshire President who passed away following a short illness. Andrew was the epitome of a Chamber member and fully committed to his role, his family of course and his profession. In Andrew's honour, the 'Andrew Digwood Award' has been created to recognise an exceptional Chamber member each year going forward in perpetuity.



Amanda Beresford
Chair of West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce

While the headwinds facing businesses in our region have declined somewhat in recent weeks, they remain very strong.

Inflation is finally declining, however it is still at a level unseen for a generation. Add to this the fact that interest rates have reached levels last seen more than 15 years ago, along with the continuing fallout from Brexit, and we have a tough situation.

Yet all is not doom and gloom. Our previous two Quarterly Economic Surveys have shown that companies are optimistic about increasing their revenues and profits. While investment plans remain on hold, particularly when it comes to hiring more staff, those looking to shed jobs are in a very small minority.

The good news is that our economy is growing. The bad news is that it is not growing by much. As we head into the autumn, let us hope that things start to finally pick up pace in terms of improving GDP and lowering inflation.



Mike Briffett
President of Leeds Chamber of Commerce

It what feels like the blink of an eye, my two years as President of Leeds Chamber of Commerce are at an end. And what an eventful two years it has been.

As I conclude my two-year term in office the city is in full swing with its Leeds 2023 celebration of culture.

When Brexit robbed us of the chance to apply to stage the European Capital of Culture, we went ahead and held our own year of celebration because this is Leeds, and that is what we do.

Channel 4 News is now broadcasting from Brewery Wharf on the banks of the River Aire. The Bank of England, the National Infrastructure Commission and the Financial Conduct Authority are all relocating jobs to Leeds.

The city is still proving a magnet for investment, despite all of the challenges it has faced.

There have of course been disappointments. The Integrated Rail Plan broke promises about high speed rail links to the city, both on HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail. We as a Chamber will not give up the fight for these transformational projects which are so necessary to provide opportunities for growth and job creation.

During my time as President we have finally become a mayoral combined authority, raising our stature as a region. Hopefully in the coming months we will begin to see some progress on mass transit for the region, something we so desperately need.

The city is not without its challenges but it still continues to be a major player in the UK's economy, boasting a diverse and world-leading offering of businesses.

My thanks to all Chamber members for their support and hard work. I wish my successor Chris Black all the very best in what is a fantastic role.



Victoria Wainwright
President of Bradford Chamber of Commerce.

It is incredible to think that my two short years as President of Bradford Chamber of Commerce are already at an end. To be elected to the role was an honour and a privilege. I am a proud Bradfordian and I love the region very much.

Significant headwinds have buffeted us in the form of a pandemic, domestic and geopolitical turmoil and a cost of living crisis unseen for a generation. However, this is Bradford - when the going gets tough we roll up our sleeves and take on challenges head on!

The city centre is now underway on what looks to be one of the most transformational chapters in its history. Darley Street Markets are approaching completion, the pedestrianisation of Hall Ings is underway and in just a few short months Bradford Live! will open its doors to welcome entertainment fans from all over the country.

At long last the Government seems to have accepted what we in the region have known for some time, namely that Bradford needs a new railway station so that its connectivity can finally match its stature.

Bradford Manufacturing Weeks continues to engage thousands of young people with the city's world class sector, helping forge new career opportunities.

Our involvement with Bradford Breakthrough saw us engage face-to-face with the then Chancellor Rishi Sunak.

And the absolute highpoint of course came last summer when Bradford was awarded the UK City of Culture for 2025. This is an incredible opportunity for us to showcase how incredible we are on a worldwide stage and will hopefully serve as a springboard for us to take our rightful place at the top table.

My thanks to all of our members for your incredible support this past two years. Bradford has always been a city of entrepreneurialism and progress throughout its history and all signs show that this is not set to change any time soon.



Laurence Beardmore
President of York & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce

It has been a profound honour to serve as president of York & North Yorkshire Chamber this past two years. It has been an eventful time in office for the region, and not without its fair share of challenges. As a Chamber we have shown our resilience and strength throughout and there is much to look forward to.

Developments planned for the region such as York Central, Coney Street and Scotch Corner promise to create new jobs and improve the region's marketability and appeal.

Devolution is at long last coming to the region and next year we will have a mayor for York and North Yorkshire.

And thanks to our interventions in the worlds of tech and hospitality, we are engaging at a national level to make sure these key areas are fostered as fertile areas for growth.

Without question the saddest part of my time as president came last year when our dear friend and colleague Andrew Digwood passed away. He was a much-loved and respected figure in the region and we miss him dearly. At our annual dinner we launched the Andrew Digwood Award to honour businesspeople who distinguish themselves in both their actions and love for the region and it will stand for years to come leaving him a legacy to be proud of.

I hope that my time as president has helped move the region forward. We are always prepared to be supportive and to act as a champion for employers in the area. York and North Yorkshire has so much to be proud of and, thanks to devolution, we now have the opportunity to be recognised alongside the country's other major city regions. Let us seize that opportunity with both hands!

I thank all of our members for their incredible support and wish my successor, Sarah Czarnecki, every success going forward.

Policy

Given the seemingly never-ending amount of challenges facing Britain's economy over the last few years, there has never been a time when the Chamber's voice and powers were needed more. The unique structure of West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce has meant we have established policy groups that can zero in on the areas of greatest economic need to deliver for the region.

Across our various groups, we boast a collective brain of the region's finest business leaders and their membership boasts thousands of years of experience across the Chamber.

Since the last Annual Report was published we have seen three Prime Ministers and the death of Her Late Majesty the Queen. Given the political upheaval we have seen, it has been somewhat inevitable that the momentum behind Levelling Up and the Northern Powerhouse has dwindled. With a general election set for next year, we as a Chamber will be pushing hard to see it restored to the political forefront.

British Chambers

The aforesaid upheaval in Britain's politics and economy has meant Chamber activity nationally has been in overdrive. The new BCC Business Council was officially launched in the Spring to significant fanfare. Thanks to the high level of access the Chamber nationally has, we have been able to press the case on inflation, tax, interest rate woes and the Labour market. The Northern Regional Assembly of all 16 Chambers in the North of England is going from strength to strength.



Economy

As the producers of Britain's biggest economic report, The Quarterly Economic Survey, the Chamber has its finger firmly on the pulse of what is happening in terms of British business sentiment and outlook. After the traumas of the second half of 2022, there has been a marked improvement in optimism regarding revenues and profitability since the start of the year.

Sales, both domestically and internationally, remain a veritable mixed bag across both manufacturing and service sector firms. Investment appetite is minimal but, while there is little sign of firms looking to recruit staff in large volumes, there is even less evidence of firms in Yorkshire looking to cull personnel.

Transport & Infrastructure

Despite chopping and changing in the world of politics, there have been some positives to take on transport infrastructure after a torrid few years of disappointment. While the much-decried Integrated Rail Plan remains Government policy, there are encouraging signs that the Government may be beginning to shift its position on Yorkshire. It now appears ministers recognise that Bradford needs to be granted a through railways station, with the Department for Transport set to revisit the plan. By the time this report is published, West Yorkshire Combined Authority will be preparing to publish its plans and timelines for mass transit in the region.

Work on City Square in Leeds has posed a great deal of disruption but should be entering the final stage of construction as this report is published. Further work to improve Leeds Railway Station is now underway following years of lobbying by the Chamber. The Chamber is also continuing to lobby for improvements to York Outer Ring Road and the A64.

Environment

Despite the continued uncertainty, businesses in the region continue to show increasing demand for reviewing and overhauling their environmental credentials. West & North Yorkshire Chamber has staged numerous events across the wider geography to share best practice and bring in industry experts. The Green Business Hub continues to provide advice and signposting to firms in need of assistance in their journey to net zero. Details can be found at www.wnychamber.co.uk/green-business-hub.

Hospitality

The Chamber made history in January when it launched the first ever Hospitality Forum since Chambers of Commerce were formed in Britain. Set up in North Yorkshire to champion the sectors crucial role in that economy, the forum has enjoyed a great deal of support and media attention, culminating in a visit by Chamber staffers and York & North Yorkshire president elect Sarah Czarnecki to Westminster in the Spring to meet with Government minister John Whittingdale and a raft of the region's MPs.

Policy Events

The Chamber has hosted a raft of events across the patch this year, most notably when it welcomed the Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey to Leeds. Our Property Forums have engaged high profile speakers from the world's of local government, environmental governance and international development.

Bradford Manufacturing Weeks and Leeds Manufacturing Festival continue to be highly successful events and the Chamber has hosted a number of high profile opportunities for executive and patron members, including visits to the House of Lords, the Great Yorkshire Show and York Racecourse.



Marketing

Over the last 12 months, we've seen a phenomenal level of organic growth across our platforms, breaking the 12K barrier on the main West and North Yorkshire Chamber X (formerly Twitter) page, and growing our LinkedIn following by a further 23%. As we've grown, we've adopted more automation, making a more dynamic connection between articles posted on our website and on our social media platforms.

Since April last year, we've shared nearly 300 news articles and posted over 100 member offers on the member news section on our website. The visitor numbers have doubled in the last period and through the onboarding of key Patron and Executive members, our distribution has grown stronger and more prestigious.

Membership

We have seen a fantastic increase of 37% in the number of new members recruited. Access to funding has assisted so many businesses, offering them additional support towards their membership. We are delighted to report a decrease of 23% in the number of member resignations. An increase in the usage of the legal advice line has resulted in an estimated £45,615 of savings.

- Almost 92% increase in new member subscription income
- 20% decrease in lost subscription income due to resignations

Property

This year we have invested in further carbon reduction measures at the Business Park. An external LED lighting scheme has reduced energy use and improved security. The installation of new efficient boilers and building heating controls to the 3-storey office block has reduced gas consumption and mitigated increases in utility recharge costs for tenants.

Our hybrid units at the Business Park have maintained 100% occupancy for the whole year. At Commerce Court and City Hub, a 95% occupancy has been maintained.

Chamber International

The number of workshops delivered on international trade subjects this year is 67. This resulted in the training of 435 delegates. Over twenty consultancy projects were undertaken and 17 people enrolled on the Excellence Academy and were successful in achieving the Academy's International Trade Qualification accredited by the British Chambers of Commerce. 13,907 export documents declared a total value of £759,810,014

December 2022 saw Chamber International being invited by British Chambers of Commerce along with three other UK Chambers to trial 'Genesis', a revolutionary new digital platform that verifies the origin of exported goods. The platform was developed by the International Chamber of Commerce and is being trialled simultaneously by Chambers in Canada, The Netherlands and France.

Diversity

Our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) committee has grown in numbers as we look to become the most progressive and diverse Chamber of Commerce in the country over the next few years. It's important that as an organisation our workforce and members reflect the diversity of sectors and communities we represent. There is work still to do here but with the right people alongside us we can ensure business support is available to all.



Events

We finally transitioned back to a calendar of face-to-face events. We've kept a selection on online, which includes Bitesize Boardroom and topical events such as the Queen's Award for Enterprise (now renamed the Kings Award for Enterprise).

This year, we launched Netwalking. This type of networking has become our most popular event so far. Come rain or shine, members and non-members are out in force, making new connections and sharing experiences. We made a change to the look and feel of our large Annual Dinners, becoming more inclusive and modernising the dress code. We had Punjabi drummers, local to Bradford, bringing our members a taste of culture in a city famous for its diversity at the Bradford Annual Dinner. The Leeds Annual Dinner delivered a panel of Yorkshire voices and tapas-style food bowls. The York & North Yorkshire Dinner moved to a new location at York Racecourse, and had a discussion panel, and performances by local music students and rounded off with music by Huge party band.

Partnering with the British Chambers of Commerce, we've brought our members' 'Round table' discussions, highlighting key issues we're working on as a chamber. One such visit saw us discussing Net Zero and how to achieve it in West Yorkshire. We also began running property and hospitality forums to support our smaller businesses with large-scale national policy changes, answering any questions they may have.

Business Services

The West and North Yorkshire Chamber were successful in their submission for delivery of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) in West and North Yorkshire.

WEST & NORTH YORKSHIRE CHAMBER PATRONS

ARUP

ADAMS
FOODSERVICE

drax

Leeds
CITY COUNCIL

Teesside
International
Airport

City of
BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

CITY OF
YORK
COUNCIL

First

RFCA
Real Estate and Property
Member of First and Leeds Association

pib
Insurance
brokers

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of York

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BECKETT
UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

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