

All Party Parliamentary Group for **Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire**

**MEETING WITH ALEX NORRIS MP, MINISTER FOR LOCAL GROWTH**

Tuesday 22nd April 2025, 13:00pm – Room M, Portcullis House and via Teams

**ATTENDEES**

**Parliamentarians:** Baroness Harris of Richmond (Liberal Democrats); Harpreet Uppal MP (Labour, Huddersfield); Paul Davies MP (Labour, Colne Valley); Anna Dixon MP (Labour, Shipley); Iqbal Mohamed MP (Independent, Dewsbury and Batley); Melanie Onn MP (Labour, Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes); Lord Wallace of Saltaire (Liberal Democrat) – Vice Chair; Mark Sewards MP (Labour, Leeds West and Morley) – Group Chair;

**Parliamentary Staff:** Hattie Turner (Office of Kevin Hollinrake MP); Tom Preston (Office of Melanie Onn MP); Ryan Witchell (Office of Charlie Dewhirst MP)

**Secretariat:** Mick Swales; Tom Coates

**Speakers:** Alex Norris MP, Minister for Local Growth at MHCLG

**MHCLG Staff:** Simon Wright; Richard Thorpe

**External Members:** Andrew Mycock (Chief Policy Fellow, Y-PERN); Samuel Lewis (Leeds City Council); Brandon Jones (Head of External Relations, First Bus); Sarah Duckering (Executive Director of Research, Knowledge Exchange and Commercialisation Services, University of Hull); Paul Townley (Commercial Director for South Yorkshire, First Bus); Andrew Brown (Academic Director, Y-PERN); Alan Menzies (Chief Executive, East Riding of Yorkshire Council); Cllr Philip Jackson (Leader, North East Lincolnshire Council); Emma Calverley (Director of Knowledge Exchange, University of Hull); Cllr Graham Turner (Kirklees Council); Claire Foale (Chief Strategy Officer, City of York Council); Tony Corby (Director City Development, City of York Council); Chris Caulton (Senior Policy and Insight Manager, Doncaster Council); Jonny Bucknall (Head of Strategic Investment & External Funding, Doncaster Council); Chris Jackson (Director of Regeneration, Hull City Council); Lorna Snowball (External Affairs Lead, Northern Powergrid); Bill Walker (Chair, Future Humber); David Shapland (Head of Marketing and Communications, Health Innovation Yorkshire and Humber); Ros Jones (Mayor of Doncaster)

**External Members in Person:** Sue Harris (Senior Director, Walker Morris LLP); Tom Wrigglesworth (External Affairs Manager, Leeds Building Society); Vincent Hodder (CEO, Leeds Bradford Airport)

**Other:** George Walker (Career and Enterprise Company)

**ADDRESS BY MINISTER ALEX NORRIS**

* It is important that he visits regional groups such as the APPG for Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire in his role as the Minister for Local Growth. Added that it is important to hear how each region is getting on with devolution and what is needed to generate growth.
* His role is not to be an expert on each local area or to pull levers on their behalf but to give areas the powers and resources they need to make changes in their communities. If local growth is to be done well it must come from the communities themselves.
* Acknowledged the sense of pride and identity seen across the region as well as its importance in regard to both population and GDP contributions.
* Raised the historic industries of the region as well as emerging sectors such as technology and life sciences and the role that coastal communities will play in the transition towards renewables.
* His role is to act as the link between the national and local economic strategies. His big ask is for Mayoral Combined Authorities to agree local growth plans. MHCLG can then look at the key themes and challenges to inform their approach.
* Confirmed that early local growth plans have shown a varied array of strengths and weaknesses. Stressed the need for the Group’s members to engage with Mayors on these issues.
* Spoke on the Government’s inheritance of Levelling Up funding pots and its attempts to ensure that it can be used to fund the priorities of each area. Added that there are several areas in the region that are part of the long-term plan for towns which will receive a fixed sum over the next decade.
* The Government want to move towards a long-term funding model that gets money out to communities, giving them the flexibility to spend it as they wish. Added that this change will give areas funding that reflects what they want as well as greater levers to shape local economies.
* Made reference to local government reorganisation saying that there is a need for greater coherence, allowing people to engage more effectively. Stressed that this is not designed to take decisions away from local areas but rather remove some of the layers of local government.

**Anna Dixon MP**

* Referenced the long-term funding offered to neighbouring areas but not to Bingley in her constituency.
* Added that Shipley had been a recipient of the towns fund but that is now coming to a close. Asked what the legacy of the towns fund will be as well as what support will be available for towns that missed out previous funding.

**Minister Norris**

* Said that the devolution of funding will mean that future decisions will be held locally at the combined authority level. Some community fund holding bodies have also been able to transition into charitable organisations, allowing them to bring in their own funding and offer different opportunities.

**Baroness Harris of Richmond**

* Raised the importance of exporting ideas from regions both nationally and internationally, asking whether there would be an integrated transport policy to support this.

**Minister Norris**

* Emerging clusters may not immediately be focused on one area with initial projects requiring cross-regional collaboration. Emphasised the importance of knitting together local growth plans as well as national policy. Added that transport is a major part of this strategy.

**Brandon Jones (First Bus)**

* Raised the importance of buses being included as a part of the planning process. Stressed the need for local authorities and construction businesses to work with transport operators to ensure that buses are included.

**Minister Norris**

* Referred to the Government’s objective to build 1,500,000 homes as well as his role as Minister for Building Safety. Stated that local planning is important to this objective with buses a key part of building new homes in easily accessible areas.

**Cllr Graham Turner**

* Welcomed the flexibility of funding and changes to the planning system. Asked how underinvested regions such as West Yorkshire can attract investment to allow local businesses to grow and create jobs.

**Minister Norris**

* The best thing local authorities concerned with funding their projects can do is to come forward as the Government want to see these projects succeed. Added that the Government is making sure that the value of investing in local communities is understood.
* The way to achieve local investment from the Treasury is not to come forward with rankings of each region’s investment but rather offer genuine projects through things such as local growth plans.

**Sue Harris (Walker Morris LLP)**

* Raised neighbourhood plans in local areas, asked whether these would need to be addressed with Leeds City Council or if they would be encompassed within the Government’s local plan.

**Minister Norris**

* The expectation is for local authorities to have plans at a authority level although they can go further and include neighbourhoods. Was unsure on whether Leeds City Council have covered this in their plan.

**Melanie Onn MP**

* Asked about when neighbourhood boards are likely to be confirmed with the deadline being before Easter. Also asked about areas with low land values and housing demand and whether there is a need for targets.

**Minister Norris**

* The deadline for neighbourhood boards was 22nd April. Added that the deadline is to ensure that communities which are already far along with the process are not held back. Similarly, some areas remain in the early stages and need guidance. To facilitate this, the Government have widened to criteria to fit local area’s aims so long as they align with the National Plan for Change.
* On housing targets, the previous absence of targets has had an impact on house building. The housing targets are set and so communities need to start to bring together plans to help reach these targets.

**Lord Wallace**

* Spoke on Saltaire’s transition from an industrial village to a hyper-gentrified area due to its transport links. Raised people living in the village but working in London. Asked how we make sure that new companies are not only encouraged but also protected from being taking over by larger multi-national corporations.

**Anna Dixon MP**

* Followed up Lord Wallace’s point by stating that there is a lack of graduate jobs in Bradford due to a lack of investment and existing businesses not taking on new staff. The Government’s industrial strategy needs to consider areas without a defined sector or industry. Also spoke on the use of pension funds to provide local capital.

**Minister Norris**

* Cities and towns losing graduates means that local areas are not seeing the benefits seen in larger cities such as London. Whilst every area can’t have emerging sectors, they can have high quality jobs in the supply chain that helps the area to grow.
* Local skills matches are also important to ensure that businesses train local people.

**Mark Sewards MP**

* Spoke on the opportunities provided by franchising buses as well as the mass transit system that is set to developed in Leeds.
* Referenced to abolition of NHS England which is a large employer in Leeds and the potential problems that may arise in the city as a result.
* Also spoke on concerns about house building in Leeds and the need for a plan to address this.

**Minister Norris**

* Reiterated the Government’s support mass transit in Leeds and the wider franchising of bus services.
* Also acknowledged the concerns that have been raised around NHS England.

**ACTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP**

* Mark Sewards MP proposed that following the meeting, the Group will combine the contributions from the meeting alongside, the already submitted proposals to produce a suite of policies. These will then be fed back to the APPG and presented to the Government in the Autumn.
* Mick Swales (Secretariat) said that he would follow up with members about how they can submit ideas for growth to the APPG.