



PROJECT ROME

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Editorial

The campaign for a One Yorkshire devolution deal is preparing for a summer relaunch, as it faces a triple threat to its ambition for an elected Mayor for Yorkshire.

The all-consuming issue of Brexit means that Government enthusiasm for further devolution deals looks to be faltering; cracks are appearing in the cross-party coalition within the One Yorkshire campaign; and they have faced unhelpful sniping from their neighbours on the Western side of the Pennines.

The hopes of the One Yorkshire campaign were sky-high back in February when Communities Secretary, Sajid Javid, met with Yorkshire Parliamentarians and local authority leaders and appeared to open the door to a Mayoral election in Yorkshire in 2020. However, Javid was promoted to Home Secretary in April, following the resignation of Amber Rudd, and his successor, James Brokenshire, has shown little interest in the devolution agenda in general, and Yorkshire devolution in particular.



The coalition of Yorkshire local authorities – 18 out of 20 authorities have signed up to the plan – sent detailed devolution proposals to the Secretary of State in March, but have had no formal response to their proposals, much to their frustration. However, ahead of a meeting of the Yorkshire Leaders Board in July, a spokesperson for the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government (DHCLG) said that there was no timetable for discussions to take place. This was followed by a letter from the Secretary of State, issued before the Yorkshire leader’s meeting, which appeared to toughen the government stance, stating that he was “not prepared” to discuss a One Yorkshire deal until the more limited Sheffield City Region devolution deal is implemented in full.

Just a few days later the Secretary of State appeared to further pour cold water on the devolution agenda when quizzed by a committee of MPs. Whilst not specifically referencing Yorkshire, his answers when quizzed on devolution were vague, talking about publishing a “devolution framework” later in the year, of the possibilities represented by ‘micro’ level devolution, and announcing that a ‘communities conference’ would be held to explore various models.

At a recent Westminster seminar Ed Cox, the former Director of the IPPR North think tank, and a major supporter of devolution, told the audience that any new devolution deals were “dead in the water”, as the government has decided to pursue its policy of local industrial strategies.

A One Yorkshire insider told Northern Agenda, “This is a classic case of kicking something into the long grass, and death by a thousand initiatives. It looks like Brokenshire has been told to take devolution off the table and he’s doing a good job of it. Brexit is eating up all of the government’s bandwidth and devolution is an unwelcome distraction for them.”

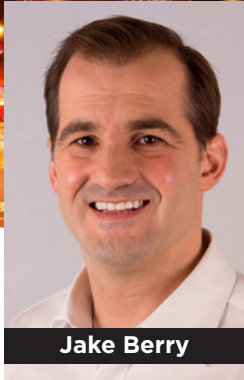
The coalition of Yorkshire local authorities appears to be holding steady in its resolve. They issued a strongly worded response to James Brokenshire’s letter, claiming that the government is “placing obstacles” in front of their devolution proposals, and urging a

“ This is a classic case of kicking something into the long grass, and death by a thousand initiatives....

- A One Yorkshire Insider



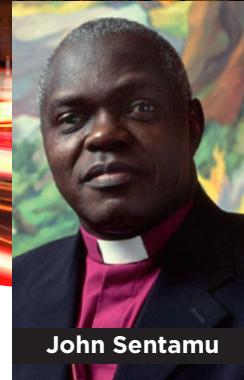
Kevin Hollinrake



Jake Berry



Sir Richard Leese



John Sentamu

constructive partnership with government to deliver devolution by 2020.

However, there are reports that some Conservative MPs in Yorkshire who were previously supportive of One Yorkshire are beginning to have second thoughts, possibly under instruction from Government Whips. Some are said to be discussing reviving the idea of having three or four separate City Region Mayors within Yorkshire, believing that is the best model to get the government on board. Conservative North Yorkshire MP, Kevin Hollinrake, recently met with Conservative local authority leaders to urge them to abandon the One Yorkshire proposals. He later denied he did so at the behest of Northern Powerhouse Minister, Jake Berry.

The concern of the One Yorkshire campaign is that if Conservative MPs begin to peel off, then pressure may be brought to bear on Conservative-led local authorities to break

with the One Yorkshire coalition. “We’re not overly worried yet, but we don’t want any chinks in the armour for the government to exploit”, one insider told Northern Agenda.

Criticism of a One Yorkshire deal also came from an unexpected source when Sir Richard Leese, the highly respected Labour Leader of Manchester City Council, gave a speech to the Centre for Cities on the future of devolution. In a surprisingly strong attack on the One Yorkshire proposal, Sir Richard said that it was, “about nostalgia, not economic reality”, and argued that Yorkshire should have four Mayors based on City Regions.

There was no official reaction by the One Yorkshire campaign to Sir Richard’s intervention. However, behind the scenes some One Yorkshire campaigners were said to be “incandescent” that he had chosen this time to attack the deal. A clearly furious Labour insider told Northern Agenda, “It was a disgraceful attack that just parroted



Dan Jarvis



John Grogan



Robert Goodwill



Baroness Warsi



After all, this is the county of Geoffrey Boycott. We're ready to dig in and bat for the long haul.

- One Insider joked

government lines. Manchester have their devolution deal, and this is about Leese trying to pull up the drawbridge. They want to be top dog in the North and they fear the economic and political power that a united Yorkshire and a Yorkshire Mayor would have. Who needs enemies with friends like that.”

However, faced with these challenges Yorkshire is not ready to give in quite so easily and is preparing its fightback. On 1st August, Yorkshire Day, the One Yorkshire campaign will re-launch with a broad coalition of supporters attending an event with the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, at his Bishopsthorpe Palace in York. Organised by Keighley Labour MP, John Grogan, and South Yorkshire Mayor, Dan Jarvis, the meeting has the backing of the regional CBI, the Institute of Directors, the Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnerships, the Yorkshire Chambers of Commerce, the Yorkshire TUC and Welcome to Yorkshire (the official tourism agency).

It will also have in attendance representatives from all 18 local authorities supporting One Yorkshire, and an array of business and political figures. Keen to shore up the cross-party nature of their campaign, Conservative MP and former Minister, Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) will front the organisation for the Conservatives and will be joined at the event by another former Conservative Minister and Chair of the party, Baroness Warsi.

As both sides appear to be toughening their positions, it is difficult to see a compromise on the horizon. It may come down to a test of will, and which side blinks first. No one is

taking bets that it will be Yorkshire. “After all, this is the county of Geoffrey Boycott. We’re ready to dig in and bat for the long haul”, one insider joked.

The government has announced the formation of a new body to support its Northern Powerhouse strategy, based on the 11 Northern Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). The Chairs of the 11 LEPs will sit on a new, government funded body called NP11 and will largely advise on economic matters and provide a link to the business community. It will be Chaired by Roger Marsh OBE, Chair of the Leeds City Region LEP, widely respected within the business community and a shrewd behind the scenes political operator.

Announcing the formation of the new body at the Northern Powerhouse Business Summit in Newcastle recently, Northern Powerhouse Minister, Jake Berry, referred to NP11 as a modern day ‘Council of the North’, a reference to the administrative body set up in 1472 by Edward IV. The move is, in part, an attempt to wrest control of the pan-Northern political agenda from the Northern Metro Mayors, particularly Greater Manchester’s Andy Burnham, who have used recent serious issues with the Northern rail network, and threat to the Northern economy posed by Brexit, to establish their own Council of the North.

However, as more than one student of history has pointed out, the original 1472 Council of the North was established to impose central government control in the North and to subdue potential rebellions by the Northern hordes.