



South Yorkshire Metro Mayor

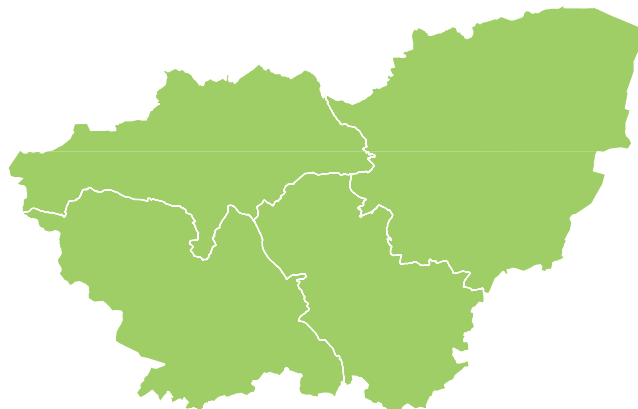
Three Policy Priorities for 2022

In May 2022, residents of South Yorkshire will return to the polls to elect their metro mayor for the second time. In 2018, voters elected Dan Jarvis as their mayor; the Combined Authority was known at the time as the Sheffield City Region Combined Authority before being rebranded to the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) in September 2021.

The mayor will be elected for a four-year term; the current mayor is not standing for re-election.

The SYMCA comprises the local authorities of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham, and Sheffield (Figure 1). Data on the SYMCA economy and how it compares to other mayoral areas can be found in the [City Monitor](#), the [High Streets Recovery Tracker](#), and the [UK Unemployment Tracker](#).

Figure 1: South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority



The next metro mayor needs to continue on the path laid out by the current mayor and take advantage of all of the powers (and funding) that come with the position, so as to improve the economic performance of South Yorkshire. This is especially important in the recovery from the pandemic. This briefing sets out three policy priorities that the next mayor should focus on:

- Improving young people’s skills and education
- Franchising the bus system
- Supporting growth in Sheffield’s city centre.

Policy priority 1: Improve the educational attainment and ambition of young people across South Yorkshire

- Despite the office’s lack of direct powers in this domain, use the mayor’s profile to champion efforts that raise educational attainment and ambition in young people.
- Promote initiatives such as the Children’s University and Sheffield Futures, and ensure that young people across all of South Yorkshire can access similar programmes.

In 2020, the SYMCA established the [South Yorkshire Skills Advisory Network](#), whose goal is to better align the skills demanded by employers with the skills taught to employees in the local labour market.

In August 2021, the SYMCA became one of the last combined authorities to take control of its own devolved adult education budget, fully funding those 19 years of age or older to obtain the skills necessary for various employment or further learning opportunities.

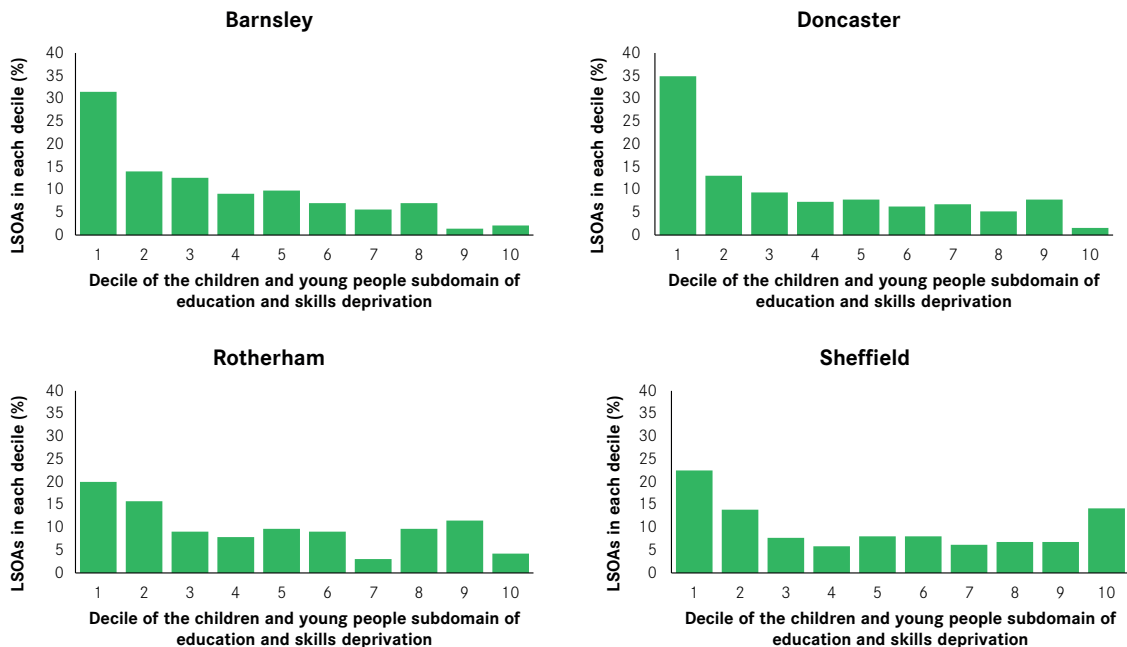
And in December 2021, the Department for Education provided £12m for the establishment of an employer-led South Yorkshire Institute of Technology (IoT). The IoT aims to meet technical skills gaps in STEM fields (such as construction, health care and engineering) and will have branches in all four local authorities.

While continuing to pay attention to adult skills, **the mayor of South Yorkshire also needs to expand his or her focus to children’s skills and ambitions.** Each local authority in the SYMCA performs below the national average in school achievement.¹ Barnsley and Doncaster, in particular, have large numbers of educationally deprived areas (Figure 2).

¹ For example, 47 per cent of students in England achieved at least a grade 5 in both their English and maths GCSEs in 2019, but only 42 per cent of students in Barnsley, 39 per cent of students in Sheffield, 34 per cent of students in Rotherham, and 33 per cent of students in Doncaster did so.

Figure 2: School-level deprivation in the local authorities of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority

Distribution of the children and young people subdomain of education and skills deprivation among lower-layer super output areas (LSOAs) in the SYMCA in 2019. LSOAs in decile 1 (as measured across England) are the most deprived; LSOAs in decile 10 are the least deprived.



Note: The children and young people subdomain of the measure of education and skills deprivation includes measures of attainment in Key Stages 2 and 4; of secondary school absence (both authorised and unauthorised); of staying on in education past the age of 16; and of entry into higher education.

LSOAs are small, contiguous areas that have roughly the same population; there are around 33,000 such LSOAs in England, with a mean population of roughly 1,500-1,600. Only data for England are available.

Source: [Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government](#) (2019).

The mayor, like other metro mayors, will not have any direct say over school-level education; school-level education has not been devolved to mayoral authorities, and local authorities retain control over their own schools.

But the mayor should use the high-profile nature of his/her position to champion the overall improvement of educational outcomes across the region.

For instance, this could include:

- Facilitating the exchange of experiences among school leaders across the SYMCA, so as to establish best practices, identify common difficulties, and discuss ways to improve the performance of schools in each local authority. Although it might be difficult to redistribute material resources across the SYMCA, the non-material resources mentioned can be replicated and adapted, often at very low cost.

- Promoting the Children’s University (CU), a charity that aims to foster a lifelong love of learning in children. Branches of the CU exist in Doncaster, Rotherham, and Sheffield, but not in Barnsley, and there are far fewer activities affiliated with the CU in Barnsley (fewer than five) than in similarly-sized Doncaster (more than 30).²
- Championing and expanding organisations such as the recently downsized Sheffield Futures, which provides mental health support and career counselling to young people, and initiatives such as Levelling up Futures in Sheffield, which aims to develop new ways to make children and young adults from all backgrounds (in Sheffield) ready for employment. Such services should be made available to all students in South Yorkshire, and an audit of the efficiency and effectiveness of these programmes should be undertaken to figure out how best to expand them to cover all four local authorities.

Policy priority 2: Franchise the bus system

- Conduct a data-led assessment of bus franchising similar to Greater Manchester’s assessment, in order to convince stakeholders and counter potential opposition from bus operators.
- Initiate a review of how best to fund bus franchising.

After the election, the mayor should push ahead with a solution to fix the region’s bus network. Buses are a critical form of urban infrastructure but remain under the ownership of private operators, leading to fragmented routes and expensive journeys for the people of South Yorkshire. While there has been a lot of discussion about bus franchising, substantive progress has not yet been made. Only on 4th March 2022 did the mayoral authority approve an [assessment](#) of bus franchising in South Yorkshire, a necessary legal first step in the process.

The mayor should continue to pursue bus franchising instead of settling for an Enhanced Partnership approach. Franchising would allow the mayor to coordinate the routes, schedules, and fares of the bus network (and potentially integrate it with that of other public transportation networks, such as tram and train networks) and make it easier to provide real-time information to users of the network, thereby making travel by bus more attractive.

The mayor should take inspiration from the recent court decision that affirmed, in the face of opposition from bus operators, that Greater Manchester carried out its bus-franchising assessment correctly.

In particular, **the mayor should follow the [data-led approach](#) of Greater Manchester’s bus-franchising assessment.** This comprehensive paper includes information on, for instance, the number of passenger journeys on public transport, the changes in the real price of daily and weekly tickets, the profile of the transportation fleet, and operator punctuality. Data will make a stronger case for bus franchising and allow the mayor to optimise what its network will look like.

² A small [evaluation of the CU](#) between 2014 and 2016 showed that Year 5 and 6 students in schools that took part in the CU made two months’ more progress in mathematics and reading than students in other schools. A [larger evaluation](#), including of schools in Rotherham, is currently underway, and a report is expected in 2024.

Both introducing and running bus franchising in South Yorkshire will require money; the costs for Greater Manchester’s five-year bus-franchising transition process were estimated at roughly £135m. **The mayor should launch a review into how the franchised system can be funded**, considering:

- Council tax increases, which is the main way Greater Manchester has raised money for its bus franchising scheme (despite its unpopularity).
- New revenue streams to compensate for the recent announcement from the Department for Transport on the Government’s National Bus Strategy. South Yorkshire will receive no additional central government funding for the city region’s transformative Bus Service Improvement Plan, while other areas have been [allocated a total of just under £1.1bn](#). New funding mechanisms are particularly pressing because ridership numbers have fallen, meaning that fare revenues cannot be relied upon to cover the full costs of franchising. The mayor should consider how to subsidise the bus network over the short to medium term, and introduce a Workplace Parking Levy and/or a separate congestion charge that, although politically difficult, will allow the mayor to channel revenues into the franchising process.
- Charges for private cars that enter the Sheffield Clean Air Zone, which will be introduced in late 2022. [According to Sheffield City Council](#), private vehicles make up 80 per cent of road traffic but only 50 per cent of emissions in the area; they say that by focusing on the 20 per cent of traffic made up of buses, HGVs, taxis and vans, pollution will be reduced “as quickly as possible”. Not charging private cars is a mistake that the new mayor should rectify, and all private cars entering the city centre should be within the scope of the Clean Air Zone.

The mayor should also foster growth that encourages the use of public transport; see policy priority 3 for more detail.

Policy priority 3: Ensure development in South Yorkshire supports growth in Sheffield’s city centre

- Develop a strategy to level up the labour market of Sheffield’s city centre with other city centres’.
- Build new dense, high-quality housing around existing transport links so that residents can get to Sheffield’s city centre quickly.

Sheffield’s city centre should be the hub of South Yorkshire’s economy. As the centre of the largest and most economically productive urban area under the metro mayor, it contains a concentration of highly paid, highly skilled jobs for residents of Sheffield and those living in nearby towns.

City centre living in Sheffield has dramatically increased since the millennium, largely due to an influx of students. The city centre population in Sheffield grew by 167 per cent between 2002 and 2017, compared to 53 and 18 per cent in the centres of Doncaster and Barnsley, respectively.

Despite these improvements, the Sheffield city centre labour market is falling behind other large city centres’. The number of jobs in Sheffield city centre actually fell by 2 per cent between 1998 and 2015, much as it did in the centres of Doncaster and Barnsley. In contrast, the number of jobs in the city centres of Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle grew by at least 25 per cent during that period.

The mayor needs a city centre catch-up strategy for Sheffield. This should aim to stimulate both the supply of and demand for jobs in the city centre, benefitting not just Sheffield but all of South Yorkshire.

On the supply side, there is not enough high-quality office space in Sheffield’s city centre. Only 40 per cent of the commercial space within Sheffield’s city centre is office space, compared to 47 per cent in Liverpool, 54 per cent in Leeds and 58 per cent in Manchester. Sheffield’s office space appears to be of lower quality than that in these other core cities too.

One of the barriers appears to be that Sheffield has more industrial space in its city centre than other cities: 22 per cent of the total floorspace in Sheffield’s city centre is industrial, compared to the national average of 10 per cent. The recent creation of the ‘E’ commercial use class, merging office, retail, restaurant and other uses into a single use class, will make the city centre’s built environment more flexible and responsive. However, industrial use will not be merged into the ‘E’ class and redevelopment of those sites will need additional support.

On the demand side, there is not enough housing that is within easy reach of Sheffield’s city centre and hence not enough residents who want to work there. Recent Centre for Cities research has shown that just 21 per cent of the residents of South Yorkshire can access Sheffield city centre by public transport in 30 minutes or less.

The poor public transport accessibility is due in part to the relatively low number of residents who live along transport corridors close to railway and SuperTram stations.

New housing developments should be built close to and densely around these transport corridors, such as in the areas just south of Donetsk Way in the suburb of Hackenthorpe. New “Boris borough” funding could be devoted to this, although it must be noted that the Government promised this money to Sheffield and not the SYMCA as part of its Levelling Up campaign.

The mayor’s powers in this area are limited, as planning power is in the hands of local planning authorities (and thus at the level of the local authority). He or she should, however, work with local authorities to explore the possibility of introducing local development orders (LDOs) for appropriate locations, and help local authorities examine how LDOs have been used elsewhere.

The mayor can also establish Mayoral Development Corporations (MDCs), whose purpose is to regenerate and develop specific tracts of land. Using the four that have already been established in the United Kingdom³ as examples, the SYMCA should examine whether MDCs would make sense near transport corridors in the region.

3 Two MDCs have been established in London, one in Stockport in Greater Manchester, and one in the Tees Valley.

Contact

Jeffrey Mo, Senior Analyst

j.mo@centreforcities.org

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