York: Human Rights City

York Human Rights City Network Indicator Report

HUMAN RIGHTS IN YORK: MOVING FORWARD WITH STRONGER FOUNDATIONS

#8, 2023

YORK HUMAN RIGHTS CITY DECLARATION

York, in becoming a Human Rights City, embraces a vision of a vibrant, diverse, fair and safe community built on the foundations of universal human rights. This vision is shared by citizens and institutions in our city, including the City Council, North Yorkshire Police, voluntary organisations and faith communities.

We are building on York's own particular history of democratic innovation, philanthropy and an international outlook, all of which have shaped our commitment to social justice.

This declaration marks an ambition, a significant point in a journey, not a final destination. As the United Kingdom's first Human Rights City we are committed to making our vision real, putting fundamental rights at the heart of our policies, hopes and dreams for the future.

Signed by:
The Right Honourable Lord Mayor of York
at the declaration event at the Merchant Taylors' Hall,
on Monday 24th April 2017

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Fionn Toland, with sections contributed by Hilary Conroy, Marilyn Crawshaw, Haddy Njie, Stephen Pittam and Jo Williams. The York Human Rights City Network is very grateful to all those who participated in the preparation of the report. We also thank the following individuals for their contribution to this report: Sian Balsom, Claire Fox, Paul Gready, Oliver Harris, Adam Raffell, Alison Semmence, and Pauline Stuchfield.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2023 saw local elections in York, with Labour gaining control of the City Council, replacing the Liberal Democrat and Green Party coalition. We would like to thank the members of that coalition who have worked with us to try and ensure the protection of human rights in the city. We would also like to welcome the new Labour administration and look forward to developing a fruitful working relationship with its members.

There were a number of positive developments in the city in 2023. A decision was taken by the new administration, based on its manifesto pledge, to reverse the ban on disabled people using their Blue Badge to enter certain parts of the city centre. This has been one of the most prominent human rights issues in the city in recent years, and we commend the tireless work of disability campaigners who fought to have the ban reversed and to ensure that the rights of disabled people are respected in York.

Another welcome development was the pledge by the new Council administration to deliver free school meals to every primary school in York, to be achieved through a community fund.[1] There were also important initiatives on race and on poverty. 2023 saw the publication of Inclusive Equal Rights UK's *Anti-Racism and Inclusion Strategy*,[2] an important step forward in trying to bring ethnic and racial equality to York; while the city's Poverty Truth Commission continued its work, with a group of Community and Civic Commissioners collaborating together to identify changes that are needed to benefit those experiencing poverty in the city.

Among the challenges facing the city was the continuing cost-of-living crisis. Across the UK, rapidly rising prices for essential goods and services placed pressure on households to make ends meet. This crisis exacerbated pre-existing socio-economic inequalities, given that low-income families spend larger amounts of their income on essential items. The impact of the crisis has been felt in York, highlighting the very real poverty that exists in the city.

In our report, we try to measure the impact of this crisis, and other factors, on the protection of human rights in York. In order to do this, we look to a set of five priority human rights: the right to equality and non-discrimination, the right to education, the right to health and social care, the right to housing, and the right to a decent standard of living.

As with previous years, there have been areas in which the city has struggled and others in which it has done well. The number of hate crimes committed in the city remains worryingly high. A substantial number of such crimes are race related and connected to the night-time economy. They involve the abuse of staff in bars and nightclubs, sometimes by visitors from outside of the city. 2023 also saw an increase in the number of homophobic and transphobic hate crimes committed in the city.

In terms of the right to housing, there has been a rise in the number of households, and children, in temporary accommodation. With regard to the right to a decent standard of living, the number of people using the Trussell Trust foodbank in the city continues to increase.

In addition to documenting progress relating to the five priority human rights, the report, as in previous years, also highlights other important human rights issues in the city, beyond our specific indicators. For example, we cite the concerns raised over mental health care in York, the recently introduced autism and ADHD pilot for adults, and the lack of adequate provision of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in the city.

Many of the challenges the city faces are interlinked. The rise in foodbank use does not simply reflect higher food prices, but the fact that, for many, their income has become insufficient to meet their needs. The mental health crisis does not exist in a vacuum. It is reflective of the fact that many members of the community are struggling to cope with the challenges they have had to face in recent years. The response to these challenges, therefore, also needs to be an integrative one, using the knowledge and talent that exists in different organisations in the city in order to find holistic solutions, within the context of national constraints.

Despite the challenges the city faces, much has been done to protect those who have been suffering during the cost-of-living crisis. The City Council declared a cost-of-living emergency in 2022 and provided payments through its Financial Assistance Scheme. Further, York's community groups, foodbanks, and volunteers have provided assistance and support to many of the city's residents.

There was also good news in relation to some of our indicators. The proportion of 16-17 year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEETs) has continued to fall. Further, an increased proportion of service

users reported that they had sufficient social contact. Other indicators show positive signs but come with caveats. For example, 2023 saw a reduction in the gender pay gap in York. However, it is still worryingly large. We have also seen the gap between those on average incomes and those on low incomes narrowing, albeit with some concern over the rate of growth of average wages. Finally, child poverty statistics indicate that there has been a decrease in the number of children in York living in poverty. However, other measures suggest a more complicated picture.

At an organisational level, the York Human Rights City Network (YHRCN) has continued to rebuild its relationship with the City Council after the disagreements over the Blue Badge issue. Steps have been taken to relaunch the Human RIghts and Equalities Board (HREB) in 2024. The HREB institutionalises the Council's, and more broadly the city's, commitment to being a human rights city by providing strategic direction for local human rights and equalities work, and by acting on concerns raised in the YHRCN's Indicator Reports. The new terms of reference for the Board include important changes designed to give it a more visible, robust and dynamic presence in the city. We welcome the new administration's plans to make Equalities and Human Rights one of its four priorities.

Finally, the Network would like to reiterate that the role of ensuring the protection of rights in York is not solely reserved for the City Council. It is a goal that other statutory bodies, charities, and even individuals can collaboratively seek to achieve. We know that resources are stretched. The squeezing of local authority budgets over the past decade is well documented,[3] with a recent report highlighting the particularly low levels of funding received by the City of York Council.[4] Added to this is the problem of the often short-term nature of the funding that is provided, making it difficult for local authorities to engage in long-term planning. The community and voluntary sectors have also been impacted by the harsh economic climate of recent years, as have other agencies.

However, York is a resilient city, with an abundance of talent, energy and ideas. Whilst pressure must be maintained on central government to provide adequate funding and resources, we, as a city, must also redouble our efforts to ensure that our most vulnerable residents are cared for and that their basic human rights are respected.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The Right

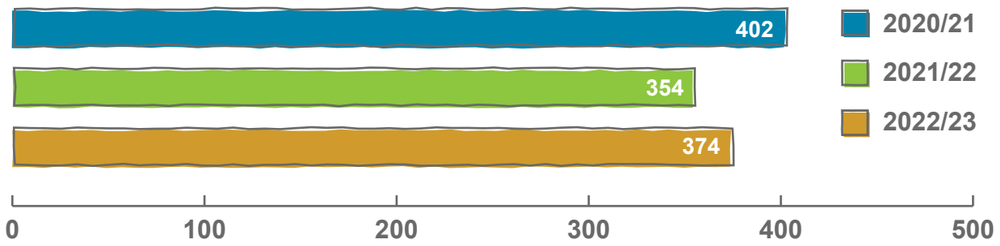
International Law	Domestic Law
International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination European Convention on Human Rights, 1950, Article 14 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966, Articles 2.1 and 26 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966, Articles 2.2, 3, 7.a.i, 10.3 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006, Articles 4, 5, 6, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30	Human Rights Art 1998, Schedule 1, Part 1, Article 14 (the Human Rights Act domesticates the European Convention on Human Rights) Equality Act 2010, Section 149

The Indicators

Hate Crimes Recorded

Hate crime is an issue that has received growing attention in York in recent years. According to statistics provided by the North Yorkshire Police, there were a total of 374 hate

Graph 1: Hate Crimes Recorded



crime incidents recorded in the city in the period from November 1st 2022 until October 31st 2023 (Graph 1).[5] That is compared with 354 recorded incidents in the previous twelve month period, an increase of around 6%.

In our 2022 report, we discussed the need for disaggregated data on hate crimes in order to provide a greater understanding of the problem.[6] Helpfully, in the breakdown for 2022/23, the North Yorkshire Police provided figures for hate crimes that had more than one underlying motivation. We hope to see more disaggregation of information in the future.

The proportional breakdown of recorded hate crimes for 2022/23 was roughly similar to that of the 2021/22 period. Racially motivated hate crimes were again the most common in the city, although at a slightly lower proportion. 55.6% (208) of recorded incidents involved a racial element, compared with 64.1% (227) in 2021/22. 12% (45) of recorded hate crimes involved disability as an underlying motivation, compared to 14.4% (51) in 2021/22.

'I think the general awareness of disability hate crime is very low, I would say.'

Interviewee from the Stop Disability Hate Project, carried out by postgraduate students at the University of York

However, there was a significant increase in the number of hate crimes involving sexual orientation. In 2021/22, 18% (64) of hate crimes had their underlying motivations recorded as 'sexual orientation' or 'transgender'. In 2022/23, the proportion of hate crimes recorded as 'homophobic' or 'transphobic' was 29.7% (111).

The York Hate Crime Partnership (YHCP), one of the bodies working to tackle the issue of hate crime in York, has been holding discussions with Generate, a transgender peer support group in the city, about how the transgender community can be better supported.[7] They have also discussed the possibility of Generate becoming one of York's 'third party reporting centres', so that the victims of transgender based hate crime can formally report incidents to the group.

The breakdown of where hate crimes are being committed in the city is also similar to the 2021/22 period, with about 35% of incidents happening in the Guildhall and Micklegate areas of the city centre. We noted in last year's report that a large proportion of hate crimes committed in York were racially motivated, and were linked to the abuse of staff working in the night-time economy.[8] The YHCP is currently developing a campaign aimed at tackling the issue of hate crime perpetrated against these workers.

There is also work being done in relation to disability related hate crimes, with a research project being undertaken by postgraduate students from the LLM in International Human Rights Law and Practice at the Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York. These students are due to report on their research in March 2024.

Gender Pay Gap

The large gender pay gap in York is something that we have highlighted in recent years, particularly in our 2022 report.[9] There, we recommended that the Council carry out some research into the reason behind the sizable gap in York, and stated that the issue needed to be foregrounded in the work of the city's policymakers.

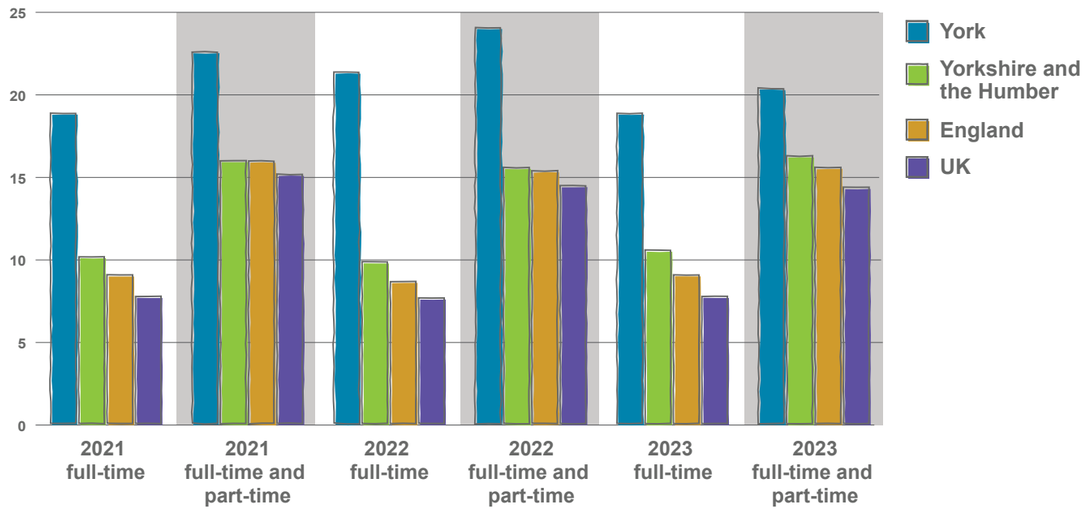
In previous reports, we have used two statistical sources to measure the gender pay gap in York. First we have measured the difference between the median, full-time, gross weekly wages of men and of women working in the city.[10] Second, we have used the official measure provided by the Office for National Statistics, that is, the difference between the average full-time hourly earnings of men and women, as a percentage of the average full-time hourly earnings of men.[11] This year, we have decided to rely solely on the latter statistic, as it provides a more accurate measure of the gender pay gap. The data related to this second statistic are set out in Table 1 and Graph 2.

In our 2022 report, we noted a widening of the gender pay gap.[12]

Table 1: Gender Pay Gap – The Difference Between the Average, Full-Time Hourly Earnings of Men and Women, as a Percentage of the Average, Full-Time Hourly Earnings of Men (Office For National Statistics)

	2021	2021	2022	2022	2023	2023
	Full-Time	Full-Time and Part-Time	Full-Time	Full-Time and Part-Time	Full-Time	Full-Time and Part-Time
York	18.8%	22.5%	21.3%	24%	18.8%	20.3%
Yorkshire and the Humber	10.1%	15.9%	9.8%	15.5%	10.5%	16.2%
England	9%	15.9%	8.6%	15.3%	9%	15.5%
UK	7.7%	15.1%	7.6%	14.4%	7.7%	14.3%

Graph 2: Gender Pay Gap – The Difference Between the Average, Full-Time Hourly Earnings of Men and Women, as a Percentage of the Average, Full-Time Hourly Earnings of Men (Office for National Statistics)



When considering those engaging in full-time work, the gap increased from 18.8% in 2021 to 21.3% in 2022. Looking at the figures for full-time work and part-time work combined, we also see that there was an increase, from 22.5% in 2021 to 24% in 2022. However, 2023 showed a welcome narrowing of the gender pay gap. In terms of full-time work, the gap has fallen back to 18.8%. For full-time and part-time work combined, the gap narrowed to 20.3%.

However, despite these decreases, the gender pay gap in York is still well above regional and national averages. For example, the gender pay gap for full-time work is 10.5% in Yorkshire and the Humber. It is 9% for England.

Some possible approaches to narrowing the gender pay gap were put forward in November 2023 by the Fawcett Society, a charity that campaigns for women's rights.[13] They argued that the key to reducing the gap in the UK is providing flexible work patterns. They stated that, if such flexibility were available, women would have more opportunities to enter the workforce whilst also allowing them to effectively manage other aspects of their lives such as parenting and caregiving. Allowing for flexible work practices for both men and women would also enable men to devote more time to childcare, freeing up their partners to participate in the workforce.

'Flexible work should not be insecure work, and must be accompanied by fair, secure employment contracts, whilst also being available across a variety of sectors and levels of pay'.

The Fawcett Society. Equal Pay Day 2023: Making Flexible Work the Default

As many options as possible should be made available to employees so that they can choose one that fits their caregiving responsibilities. These options might include hybrid and remote working, job sharing or term-time only working. Such work must be fair and secure and available across different levels of pay.

Stephen Lewis, The Press, York

Update: Reverse the Ban

A lot has happened with regards to the Blue Badge issue since last year's report. Early 2024 will see the reopening of the city centre to Blue Badge holders, denied access since November 2021: a victory for disabled people and an affirmation of their human rights.

Reverse the Ban's 27 disability and age-related and allied organisations continued to work hard in the run up to the local elections in May 2023. The campaign attracted 'celebrity' endorsements, including from Paralympians Beth Moulam and Stephen Miller, disability influencer Pippa Stacey, and national disability figure Tom Shakespeare. Then, in February, the coalition was delighted when Dame Judi Dench added her voice. Born and raised in York and now living with visual impairment, she attracted international attention to the issue. The campaign went viral!

The coalition held their third demonstration on March 17th, this time outside the National Spring Conference of the Liberal Democrat party, held in York.

The coalition asked all four local main political parties to provide it with statements about the Blue Badge ban and included those on a non-party political leaflet designed to inform the voting public ahead of the May elections.

The coalition organised a series of early morning 'pop ups' at well- known York venues, including the gates to the Museum Gardens, Lendal Bridge, the riverside, Cliffords Tower, York Crown Court and the city walls. Members quickly erected banners and posters,

took photos, took them down again and disappeared! They then put the photos on social media and on the campaign website and attracted lots of attention.

Two groups of postgraduate human rights students at the Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York, reported in April on the independent research that they had conducted for the coalition. One study was entitled, *The Blue Badge Test in York: Can the Realisation of Disabled People's Rights and the Prevention of Terrorism be Reconciled*?. The other was, *'Nothing About Us Without Us': A Qualitative Analysis of City of York Council's Local Transport and Access Consultation Practice 2020-2*.[14] Both reports generated widespread interest outside of York as well as in the city.

Throughout all this time, the campaign continued to attract local, national and international attention, including the MP for York Central securing a successful adjournment debate in Parliament. The campaign was featured in such prominent places as the BBC website, the national Access All podcast and national media.

In May, the Labour Party took control of the City of York Council, having made reversing the ban one of their key election pledges (as did the Conservatives). They immediately confirmed their commitment and set about the legal process of effecting the change. Phase one of the required consultation process took place in the summer, and culminated in the Council Executive formally deciding in October to reverse the ban.

In December, two dedicated workshops for Blue Badge holders were held, ahead of allowing the first people in from January 4th, through one entry and exit point, with a second entry and exit point planned for Easter 2024.

A wider consultation was launched in November, on a draft city-wide Transport Strategy, with one of its aims being to make the city more accessible. The Council has engaged the Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York, to oversee the human rights aspects of this process.

The front cover of the 2023 York Disability Week programme – which is supported by the YHRCN and held each year around the UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3rd – featured a graphic celebrating the lifting of the ban. Underneath was the quote: 'when we allow the threat of terrorism to take away the fundamental human rights of our residents and visitors then terror has won – Victory for Disabled People!'. In 2024, York Disability Week will be able to hold some of its events in the city centre for the first time since 2019.

Although the specific work of the Reverse the Ban coalition is almost done, that of maintaining and improving access and human rights for disabled people and tackling the ableism that underlies discrimination and oppression goes on, and on, and on. The alliances now formed will add weight to that work.

CASE STUDY: Inclusive Equal Rights UK

Inclusive Equal Rights UK (IER UK) is a diverse group of individuals who are driving the action needed to make York the first Anti-Racist and Inclusive city in the north of England. The group was established after the City of York Council unanimously agreed, in October 2021, to support the motion to become an anti-racist city. The last 12 months have seen much progress towards achieving this ambition.

In the early months of 2023, IER UK published a report entitled, *A Snapshot View of Racial Disparity in the City of York,* which highlighted the structural inequalities and disparities facing ethnic minorities in the city.[15] The data were collected and analysed by social researchers and a member of IER UK. Some of the information was already in the public domain, while other data were collected through Freedom of Information requests. Due to time and resource constraints, ten key sectors were targeted, with data gathered on some of the city's schools and further education establishments, health organisations, housing, social care, and policing. The report also includes a summary of the data gathered through a public survey.

Key findings included:

- Census data shows approximately 14% of York's population, that is one in seven people, are from ethnic minorities. This is an increase from 12% in 2011.
- 6.3% of the City of York Council staff are from ethnic minorities, less than half the percentage of ethnic minorities in York's population.
- Of the 400 managers in adult social care in York, only 1.5% are

from ethnic minorities, compared to the national figure of 15.7%.

- In 2022, hate crime incidents in the North Yorkshire Police area exceeded 1,000 for the first time, of which around two thirds were race related hate crimes.
- From 2018-2020, individuals of the Black and Black British population were 90 times more likely to be stopped and searched by North Yorkshire Police than White British individuals.

The data collected for the report helped shape the Anti-Racism and Inclusion Strategy for York.[16] The five-year strategy was developed in partnership with academics from the Institute for Social Justice, York St John University. It includes a detailed plan of action to address institutional racism and unconscious bias, promote cultural diversity and inclusion, and improve access to education and employment opportunities for marginalised groups.

Arthur Edelmans on Unsplash

In July 2023, the City of York Council approved the Anti-Racism and Inclusion Strategy and then unanimously passed a detailed anti-racist action plan. Numerous organisations and institutions, including the City of York Council, Diocese of York, and York St John University supported the strategy. They also showed their commitment to change by making a pledge created by IER UK.[17] This is a commitment to close inequality gaps by reviewing existing policies and practices within their organisations, in order to make sure they are not creating structural barriers. They also pledged to make opportunities accessible to everyone, and to ensure that experiences of racism are eradicated.

With the strategy approved, the IER UK Team is now developing an Anti-Racism Strategic Task Force. A governance structure has been developed to monitor and record progress made by the task force with implementing the strategy's key actions. The aim is to have the task force up and running early in 2024.[18]

EDUCATION

The Right

International Law	Domestic Law
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966, Article 13 Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Article 28	Human Rights Act 1998, Schedule 1, Part 2, Article 2 Equality Act 2010, Part 6, Chapter 1, Section 85 Education Act 1996, Section 13 Education and Skills Act 2008, Part 1, Chapter 1

The issue of school absenteeism received a significant amount of attention nationally in 2023. In April, an article in the Economist stated that, up to that point in the 2022/23 school year, more than one-fifth of students in England had been persistently absent from school, meaning they have missed at least 10% of their classes. This number is almost double the pre-Covid rate.[19]

School absenteeism has been identified as an issue in York, although the figures for the city are lower than national averages. For example, one in eight (12%) of primary school students in York had been persistently absent in the 2022/23 school year, up from 7% in 2018/19.[20] The national figure was 17%. Just over 25% of secondary schoolchildren in York were persistently absent in 2022/23, up from 13% in the 2018/19 school year. The national figure was 28%.

School absenteeism in York is particularly prevalent amongst children with special educational needs, and amongst children who are eligible for free school meals.[21] Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number of suspensions and expulsions from schools in the city, which also seems to be an issue nationally.

Although the data on school absenteeism are helpful in giving us a sense of the extent of the issue in York, they do not tell us everything. For example, the statistics show

the percentage of students who are absent for over 10% of the school year, but within that cohort there could be a large variation in attendance levels. Further, the data do not tell us why children are absent from school.

A recent report by Public First identified several contributing factors to the rise in absenteeism across the UK.[22] For example, they state that there is evidence of a change in attitudes amongst parents towards absenteeism. The experience of school closures during the pandemic has led some parents to question whether high levels of school attendance are as important as was once thought, and that other activities outside of school should also be prioritised.[23]

The mental health crisis amongst children and young people is another contributing factor. There has been a rise in Emotion-Based School Avoidance whereby the mental health of some children appears to be adversely affected by the school environment itself, the thought of having to attend, and/or the lack of support services. Linked to this are parents' reports of schools not doing enough to accommodate children who are neurodivergent or who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health.[24] The cost-of-living crisis has also impacted attendance levels, with transport costs a particular issue for low-income families.[25]

Low levels of school attendance can have a significant impact on both a child's well-being and academic performance. So, what can be done to improve the situation? The Public First report lays out several recommendations. It calls for a review of the way in which schools communicate on the issue of absenteeism, noting a breakdown in the relationship between schools and many parents.[26] The report questions the efficacy of the fines system used to penalise parents whose children have low attendance rates and calls for a review of the system. It states that more intensive and nuanced support needs to be provided to those experiencing significant issues with attendance. Further, the report argues that improving support for children with special educational needs, and children who are experiencing mental health issues, could significantly improve levels of attendance.

Whatever approach is taken, demonising parents whose children are persistently absent is likely to be counterproductive. A nuanced approach is required which seeks to understand why levels of absenteeism are increasing, and to provide the necessary support so that children can get the best out of their school years.

The issue of school absenteeism has emerged at a time when schools in the north of England are falling behind their counterparts in London in terms of funding. A report by the Child of the North All-Party Parliamentary Group in September 2023, noted that schools in London receive an average of £6,610 per pupil, compared with £5,938 for schools in Yorkshire and the Humber.[27]

The Indicators

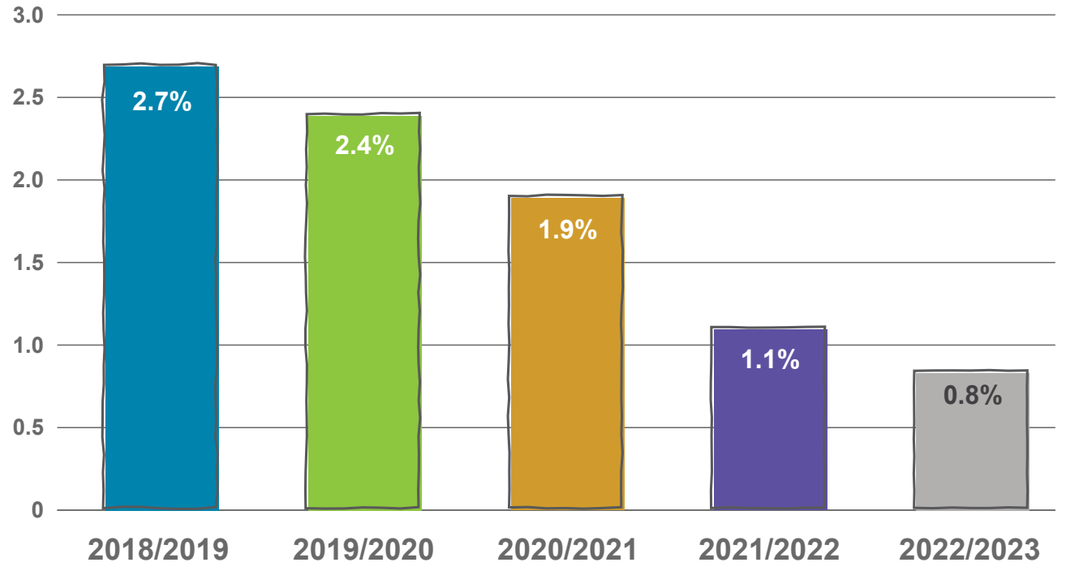
Proportion of 16-17 Year-Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs)

The reduction in the proportion of 16-17 year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEETs), has been one of the good news stories in York that we have covered in our Indicator Reports over the past number of years. Back in the 2016/17 financial year, the figure for this indicator stood at 3.3%. This number has decreased continually year-on-year since then, and in the 2022/23 financial year, has dropped to 0.8% (Graph 3).[28]

People Attaining Expected Standard or Higher in Reading, Writing and Maths at the End of Primary Education (End of Key Stage 2: Aged 10-11) – Disadvantage Gap

The disadvantage gap compares the percentage of economically disadvantaged children reaching the expected standards for reading,

Graph 3: Proportion of 16-17 Year-Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training (Source: York Open Data)



writing and maths at the end of primary education, to the percentage of non-economically disadvantaged children reaching those standards. Unfortunately, at the time of writing the data for this indicator had yet to be published.

However, there has been some discussion in the past year about the situation nationally. In May 2023, the House of Commons, Committee of Public Accounts published a report which considered the disadvantage gap, including at Key Stage 2.[29] The most significant aspect of the report was the disclosure that the Covid-19 pandemic had reversed the gains that had been made in the previous decade in closing the gap. According to the report, nationally the disadvantage gap at Key Stage 2 was 3.34 in 2011.[30] This had fallen to 2.90 in 2018, but had increased to 3.23 by 2022.

The report noted that disadvantaged children were disproportionately affected by the disruption caused by the pandemic.[31] It highlighted the issue of school absenteeism as a likely contributing factor to the increase in the disadvantage gap, noting the higher rates of absenteeism since the pandemic, and stating that the rate of absenteeism for disadvantaged students was higher than that of the general student population.[32]

As a result of the increased disadvantage gap, the Department for Education has announced the provision of £4.9 billion in funding, aimed at addressing the issue. The funding is primarily directed towards providing tutoring for disadvantaged pupils. However, as the report noted, on the department's projections, narrowing the gap to pre-Covid levels could take as long as a decade to achieve.[33]

Update: Rights Respecting Schools

The Children and Young People's Safeguarding Partnership (CYSCP), has developed a children's rights toolkit for: education and childcare settings; youth groups; and services, organisations, and businesses whose work impacts on young people.[34] The toolkit is being trialled with partners, facilitated by an educational psychologist from the City of York Council, to embed a rights-based approach across the city.

CYSCP has been working with the educational psychology service, the healthy child service, early years advisors, York Young Carers, York Youth Council, Access4All participation group, Stockton-on-the-Forest Primary, Clifton with Rawcliffe Primary, Hob Moor Primary, York High, and Over the Rainbow childcare.

The partnership encourages everyone to use the toolkit and is aiming to work within a wide range of settings and organisations. The partnership encourages anyone who would like support or further information to contact them.[35] It is also keen to receive feedback and examples of how the toolkit is being used, in order to be able to share good practice with others.

Wiggington Primary School has gained its silver award within Unicef's Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) programme. St Paul's Nursery, Clifton with Rawcliffe, Haxby Road, and Westfield Primary Schools are all working towards their silver award after achieving their bronze.[36]

Finally, research is currently being undertaken at the Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York, to understand how the city may best adopt the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) locally.[37] The recommendations will support the building of a legacy of rights-based practice for all of our children and young people growing up in York, ensuring that their rights are realised and that they experience a sense of belonging, citizenship and empowerment.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The Right

International Law	Domestic Law
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966, Article 12 Treaties protecting particular groups (women, children, persons with disabilities) also include health and social care protections e.g. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006, Article 12	Care Act 2014, Section 1 and 2 National Health Service Act 2006, Section 1 National Health Service Constitution 2015 Health and Social Care Act 2012

The cost-of-living crisis has had negative effects on the mental health of many people across the UK. The University of York Cost of Living Research Group has been tracking this impact in their *Changing Cost of Living Study*. They have noted increased levels of anxiety amongst participants as their incomes have been squeezed.[38] A report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group Child of the North has warned that 'there is a real risk that the cost-of-living crisis could entrench the mental health crisis across the North of England'.[39]

It is worrying, therefore, that there were reports in 2023 about the perilous state of mental health care in York. For example, in May, York Central MP Rachael Maskell said that mental health services in the city were 'in crisis', blaming underfunding and staff shortages.[40]

Some of the problems in this area were highlighted in Healthwatch York's report, *Breaking Point: A Recent History of Mental Health Crisis Care in York*, published in June 2023.[41]

The authors of the report interviewed a number of staff, patients, and carers in order to gain an understanding of mental health crisis care in the city. Several issues were highlighted in the report. For example, there were concerns about the treatment of people experiencing mental health issues who attended accident and emergency departments, with judgmental attitudes from staff and inadequate follow-up care reported.[42]

The report noted a general problem with communication and collaboration between the various teams and services involved in mental health crisis care,[43] and stated that waiting times for mental health services continued to be an issue in the city.[44]

Some positives regarding mental health care in York were also highlighted, with community support services, including voluntary organisations and the Council's Local Area Coordinators being highly valued by individuals who are struggling with their mental health.[45]

'It is all very well and good encouraging us to speak up and ask for help, but is the help there?'

Participant in Healthwatch York Research. Published in, Breaking Point: A Recent History of Mental Health Crisis Care in York. 2023

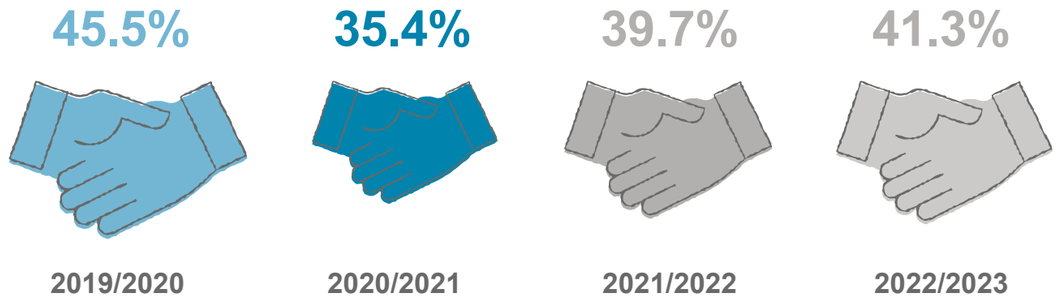
The Indicators

Proportion of Service Users Who Have as Much Social Contact as they Would Like

We know that social isolation is an issue in York, as it is in many other places in the UK. In order to get a sense of the extent of the problem in the city, we consider the proportion of social care users, defined as those receiving assistance under the Care Act 2014, who report that they have as much social contact as they would like (Graphic 1).

In last year's report, we noted an improvement in the figures for York,[46] and that improvement continued in 2023. In 2020/21, during the pandemic, the proportion of service users reporting that they had sufficient social contact dropped to a low of 35.4%. This improved to 39.7% in 2021/22 and the latest figures for 2022/23 show that the number has risen slightly to 41.3%. This increase

Graphic 1: Proportion of Service Users Who Have as Much Social Contact as they Would Like (Source: York Open Data)



is to be welcomed, although we are still to reach pre-pandemic levels, with over half those asked stating that they have insufficient social contact.

In their Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2032, the Council has identified social isolation as a key issue that needs to be addressed.[47] We therefore look forward to continued improvement with regards to this indicator in the future.

Life Expectancy and Healthy Life Expectancy

Unfortunately, the statistics for life expectancy and healthy life expectancy had not been released at the time of writing. However, 2023 did see some discussion of the alarming disparities between different areas of York in terms of life expectancy.[48]

Table 2: Male Life Expectancy by Ward – 2021/22 (Source: York Open Data)

1	Copmanthorpe	87.08
2	Bishopthorpe	85.79
3	Strensall	82.99
4	Haxby and Wigginton	82.66
5	Dringhouses and Woodthorpe	82.41
6	Wheldrake	82.29
7	Micklegate	81.08
8	Rural West York	80.86
9	Huntington and New Earswick	80.57
10	Fulford and Heslington	80.55
11	Osbaldwick and Derwent	80.35
12	Holgate	80.14
13	Rawcliffe and Clifton Without	80.04
14	Heworth Without	79.97
15	Acomb	79.84
16	Guildhall	79.00
17	Hull Road	78.92
18	Fishergate	76.94
19	Clifton	76.87
20	Westfield	76.09
21	Heworth	75.43

These disparities were apparent in the figures for the 2021/22 period (Tables 2 and 3).[49] According to those statistics, a boy born in Copmanthorpe could expect to live until the age of 87.1, whilst the life expectancy for a boy born in Heworth is only 75.4. That's a gap of almost twelve years.

There is a similar disparity when we consider female life expectancy in York. A girl born in Copmanthorpe could expect to live until 91.8, whilst a girl born in Westfield could only expect to live until 80.7 years old.

In last year's report, we noted the link between life expectancy and income levels.[50] This relationship

Table 3: Female Life Expectancy by Ward – 2021/22 (Source: York Open Data)

1	Copmanthorpe	91.79
2	Bishopthorpe	87.95
3	Heworth Without	87.56
4	Dringhouses and Woodthorpe	86.86
5	Fulford and Heslington	85.58
6	Strensall	85.11
7	Holgate	84.69
8	Huntington and New Earswick	84.36
9	Rural West York	84.12
10	Wheldrake	84.03
11	Haxby and Wiggington	83.94
12	Mickelgate	83.71
13	Osbaldwick and Derwent	83.14
14	Rawcliffe and Clifton Without	83.13
15	Guildhall	82.92
16	Hull Road	82.31
17	Clifton	82.13
18	Fishergate	81.79
19	Acomb	81.75
20	Heworth	81.27
21	Westfield	80.65

is evident when one looks at the figures for life expectancy across wards and compares them to income related variables. For instance, the wards of Heworth, Westfield, Clifton, and Guildhall are amongst the six wards with the worst projected life expectancy for both males and females. They are also amongst the top six wards in terms of the proportion of their residents claiming Universal Credit and the proportion of both primary and secondary schoolchildren who are eligible for free school meals.[51]

This large disparity in life expectancy between wards is a topic which received some media attention in 2023, with a number of councillors speaking about the need to take action on the issue.[52] In its health and well-being strategy for 2022-2032, the Council has made it a priority to reduce life expectancy and healthy life expectancy (an estimate of the condition of one's health based on a self-evaluation) disparities in York.[53]

CASE STUDY: Autism and ADHD Pilot

On Monday March 27th 2023, the Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) introduced a 3-month pilot, which meant that adults approaching their GP seeking an autism and/or ADHD diagnosis in York and North Yorkshire were refused access to assessment unless they met the following criteria:

- Immediate self-harm or harm to others. A mental health assessment must have been undertaken and a crisis management plan put in place.
- Risk of being unable to have planned life-saving hospital treatment, operations, or care placement.
- Imminent risk of family court decisions, determined on diagnosis e.g. family breakdown, custody hearing.

If patients did not meet these criteria, they were directed to an online self-report questionnaire called the *Do it Profiler*.[54] Individuals filled this in alone and received a report which provided neither sufficient evidence for disability benefits nor access to medication in the case of ADHD.

This was a financial decision, made due to the limitations of the private NHS provider's contract,[55] and rising referral numbers caused by increased awareness of autism and ADHD traits, especially in women.

York Disability Rights Forum's Neurodivergent subgroup[56] (YDRF) fought back against this pilot through blog posts on their website.[57] They stated that, 'We are very concerned that there has been no risk assessment, no engagement with the people who will be affected, and no consideration of the potential deadly impact of this decision'.

YDRF also worked alongside Healthwatch York, in order to engage with the community and to understand the impact of these changes, and to put this information together in an evaluation report.[58]

YDRF inquired into who within the system could hold the ICB accountable for its actions and were informed that the ICB 'monitors itself'.

YDRF has spoken at every City of York Council, Health and Wellbeing Board since then, and will continue to ensure the elected members understand the ongoing harm caused by this pilot. There has also been significant local and national press coverage of the issue.

The pilot was extended for a further nine months in June 2023, again without any consultation or recognition of the harm it was causing. YDRF launched a CrowdJustice fund and raised over £7000 to fund a legal response to the actions of the ICB.

Represented by Bindmans LLP, they sent legal letters detailing how the pilot contravened law, statutory duties and guidelines, and demanded transparency from the ICB.[59] YDRF has met with the ICB to open communication channels.

As a result of the community's efforts, the ICB have made some changes, although they have also caused further issues.

The ICB has removed the first criteria and replaced it with the option of direct referral from the Community Mental Health Teams. They consider this an 'expansion' of the criteria, but it is difficult to access these teams and their knowledge and acceptance of neurodivergence is limited.

The ICB has taken responsibility for those who have not met the criteria, and have created an 'amber/green waiting list' which, they say, will ensure that all patients will still have access to assessment and diagnosis at some unknown point in the future.

The ICB has launched an engagement plan starting in December 2023, nine months after the pilot started. The first two events were not ND friendly in their design. Focus groups are being planned by the ICB, and YDRF have made suggestions to improve the community experience.

The ICB has extended the pilot again. It will now be a 15-month pilot due to end on June 27th 2024.[60]

Update: Accessible Information

In last year's report, we brought attention to the issue of access to information, a component of the right to freedom of expression and opinion.[61] In order to ensure the requirements of this right are met, information must be provided in a manner that is accessible to a range of different people, including disabled people. This means providing information in a range of formats.

There are a number of regulations in place in the UK aimed at ensuring that information is provided in an accessible manner, including the *Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018,* and the *Accessible Information Standard*.

In last year's report, we noted that Healthwatch York had raised concerns about problems that service users in York were having when trying to access information about services, and had put forward a number of recommendations for organisations in the city to consider.[62] In late 2022, they published a report that set out the responses to these recommendations, from North Yorkshire Police, York and Scarborough Teaching Hospital NHS Trust, the City of York Council and York CVS.[63]

These organisations were at different stages of progress. For instance, North Yorkshire Police conceded that they did not have an accessible information policy and were not in compliance with several of the recommendations put forward.[64] However, they were taking steps to address this. York and Scarborough Teaching Hospital NHS Trust stated that they had processes in place to support staff in meeting patient requirements surrounding information accessibility, but needed to ensure these processes were better embedded in the organisation.[65] Further, they noted that they needed to improve the extent to which they enquired about the needs of patients in relation to accessible information.[66] The trust stated that implementing the *Accessible Information Standard* is one of their equality objectives.[67]

katemangostar on Freepix

The City of York Council submitted the most extensive response and has taken many actions to ensure that they provide information in an accessible manner, centred around providing information in a number of ways and in a range of formats.[68] The Council stated their intention to continue to improve accessibility of information, by, for example, promoting accessibility training across the organisation.[69] Finally, York CVS put forward its plans for improving information accessibility, including developing an action plan for the organisation and offering information in a range of formats.[70]

We will continue to monitor progress in this area in future Indicator Reports.

THE RIGHT TO HOUSING

The Right

International Law	Domestic Law
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966, Article 11 Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Article 27.3	Human Rights Act 1998, Schedule 1, Part 1, Article 8 Housing Act 1996, Part 6 and 7 Protection from Eviction Act 1977 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

In September 2023, the City Council announced that it would not be renewing its Early Intervention and Prevention contract with the Salvation Army, through which the latter provided some services for rough sleepers. This announcement received a significant amount of local media coverage.[71] According to the City Council, the funding it had received since 2019, including the £260,000 it recently secured from central government to develop its Rough Sleeping Navigator team, has meant that it no longer needed to procure services from an outside entity.[72] It has been reported that the Council will continue its relationship with the Salvation Army, in some capacity, in the future.[73]

The Council plans to develop its approach to tackling homelessness by involving a number of different services. The aim, according to Council Leader Claire Douglas, is to eradicate homelessness by the summer of 2027.

At the time of writing, the Council's new strategy on tackling homelessness had yet to be published, and a spokesperson has indicated that it would be a few months into 2024 before this takes place.[74] However, Council officials have given some details. The focus will be on tackling rough sleeping. The new approach will involve the creation of a drop-in service for rough sleepers at the Peasholme Centre hostel, as well as a phone line service. There will also be an expansion of the Housing First programme, which we discussed in our 2018 Indicator Report,[75] and attempts to expedite the process through which those experiencing homelessness are moved into the private rented sector.

The Indicators

Statutory Homelessness

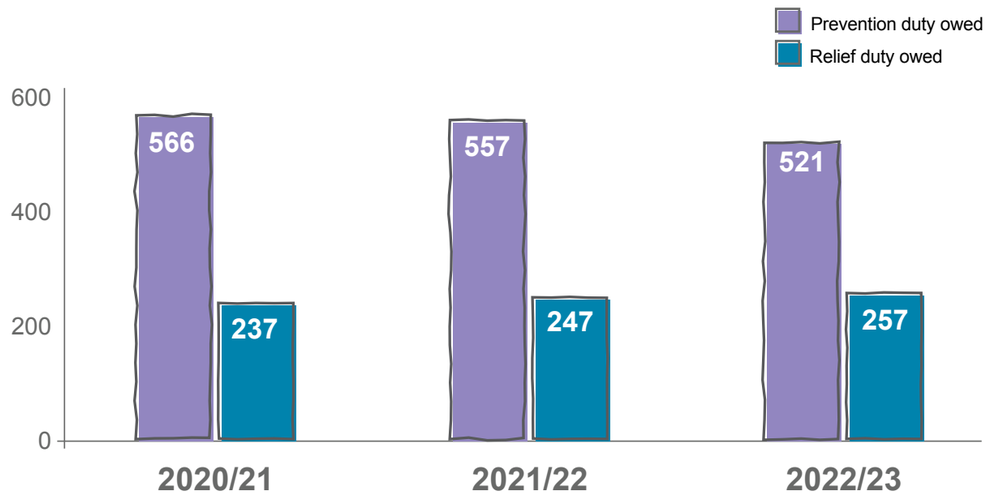
When someone is assessed for homelessness, there are three possible outcomes. First, the person may be assessed as being homeless. In that case the local authority is deemed to have what is called a relief duty towards the person. Alternatively, the person may be assessed as being at risk of homelessness. In that case, the local authority is deemed to have what is called a prevention duty. Finally, a person may be assessed as not being at risk of homelessness, in which case the local authority is deemed not to have a statutory duty towards that person.

Unfortunately, due to issues arising from the introduction of a new IT system used to record homelessness data, we do not have figures for the total number of people assessed for homelessness in 2023, nor do we have the figure for the number of people deemed not to be owed any duty. We do know that 521 people were assessed as being owed a prevention duty, down from 557 in 2021/22 (Graph 4). There was a slight rise in the number of people assessed as being owed relief duty, up from 247 in 2021/22 to 257 in the latest period. We hope that the full set of statistics will be available for next year's Indicator Report, so that we can properly assess the homelessness situation in the city.

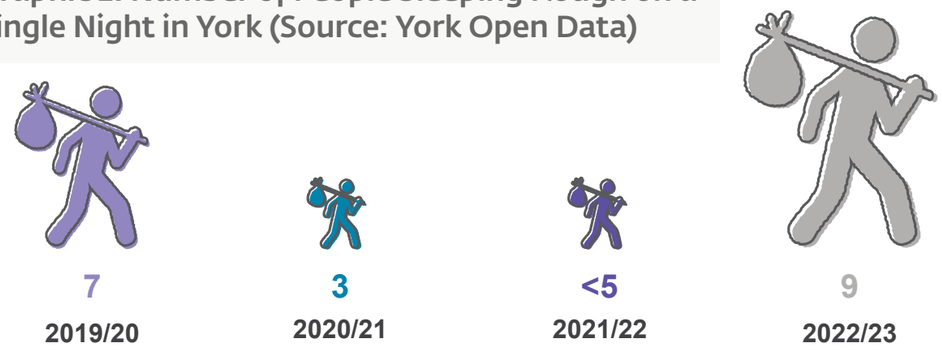
Rough Sleeper Count

The rough sleeper count indicator records the number of people sleeping

Graph 4: Statutory Homelessness Assessment in York by Financial Year (Source: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities)



Graphic 2: Number of People Sleeping Rough on a Single Night in York (Source: York Open Data)



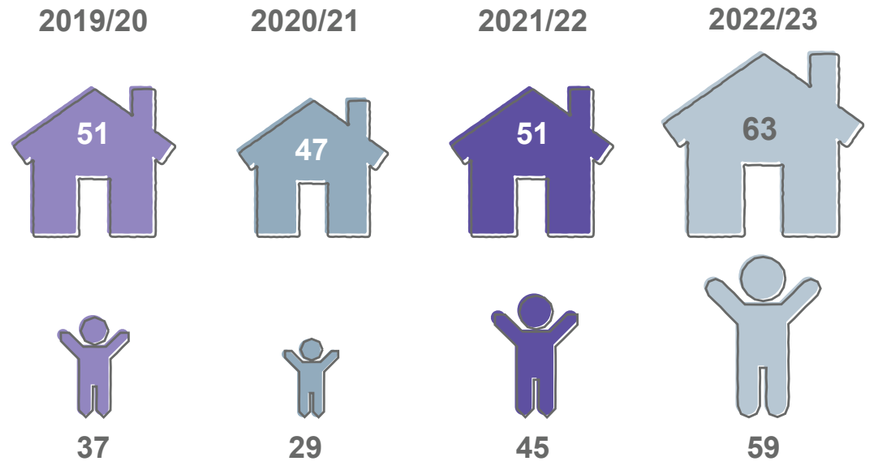
outdoors in York on one particular night of the year (Graphic 2). The figure for the 2022/23 period is 9, up from less than five in 2021/22.[77]

Number of Households / Children Living in Temporary Accommodation

This indicator records the average number of households, and the average number of children, who are living in temporary accommodation in York throughout the year. When a person or a family is assessed as being homeless they may be offered what is known as 'emergency accommodation' for a short period of time. If that person or family is deemed eligible for longer-term housing they may then be offered temporary accommodation until such long-term housing becomes available.

In the 2021/22 period, we saw an increase in both the number of households, and the number of children living in temporary accommodation, and this trend continued in 2022/23 (Graphic 3).

Graphic 3: Number of Households / Children Living in Temporary Accommodation in York (Source: York Open Data)



In 2022/23 there were, on average, 63 households in temporary accommodation in York.[78] That's compared with 51 households in 2021/22, a 24% increase. There was also a significant rise in the average number of children living in temporary accommodation in York in the 2022/23 period, at 59.[79]

That's up from 45 in 2021/22, a 31% increase.

According to a report, the new Council strategy for tackling homelessness will involve expanding the amount of temporary accommodation available in the city, a welcome development, given the increased number of people who need it.[80]

CASE STUDY: Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation in York

In last year's report, we highlighted the campaign which the York Travellers Trust (YTT) has run, for more than 10 years, to ensure the Council fulfils its legal obligation to provide sufficient culturally appropriate accommodation for York's Gypsy and Traveller communities.[81]

In early 2023, YTT made a presentation to the YHRCN Steering Group on its campaign in relation to the Local Plan. As a result, the Network submitted evidence in March to the Local Plan Inspectors, through the consultation process. This evidence supported YTT's assessment that the Council's plans are flawed and that the proposed policy will fail to deliver the accommodation needed.

In September, a Freedom of Information request revealed to YTT that those responsible for housing in the Council were also troubled by the Council Planners' proposals, and in particular the idea to increase the size of the Osbaldwick site. The Inspectors expressed their surprise at the information revealed, and demanded a response from the Council. When they received this response, they asked YTT for its reaction to the Council's position. In December, YTT submitted evidence showing why the Trust is firmly of the opinion that the Council's proposals will not work, are not legally compliant, and consequently that the Local Plan is not sound and cannot lawfully be adopted.

The Inspectors have called for a new public hearing to look into this. The hearing should take place in the first quarter of 2024.

A DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING

The Right

International Law	Domestic Law
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966, Article 11 Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Article 27 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006, Article 28 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979, Article 14 European Social Charter 1961, Article 4 (1)	There are no domestic laws specifically relating to the right to a decent standard of living

The Indicators

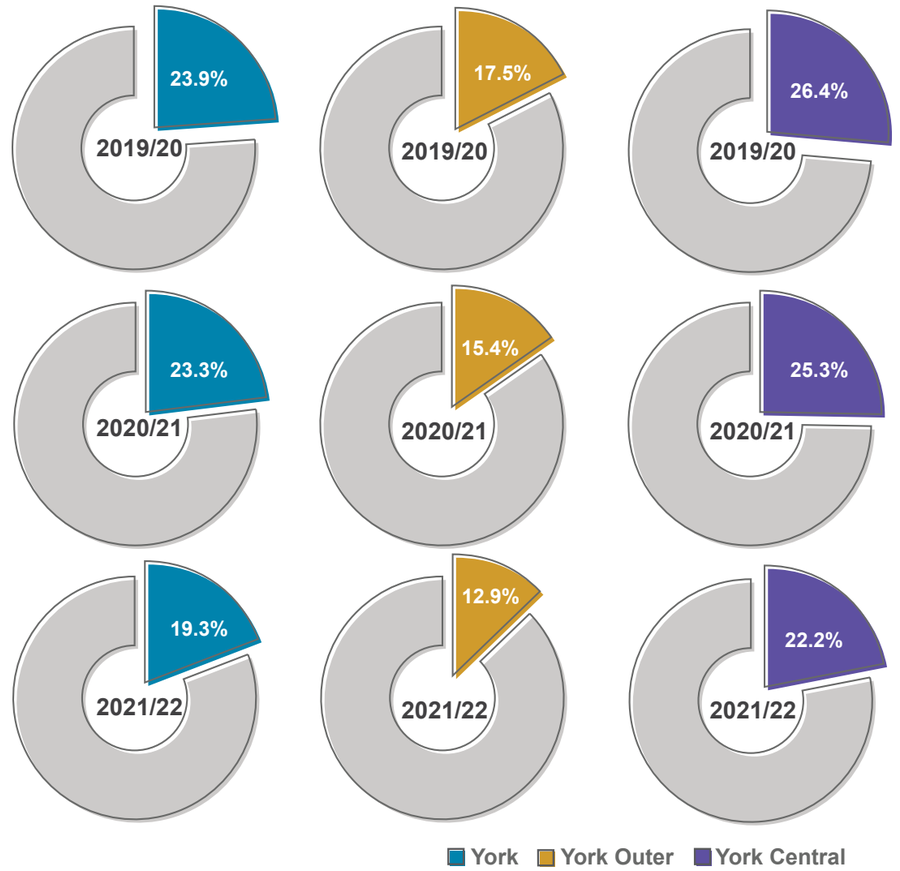
Child Poverty

Child poverty is measured by looking at the number, or proportion, of children living in families whose reported income is less than 60% of the UK median. We rely on statistics provided by York Open Data, and on figures published by the End Child Poverty Coalition.

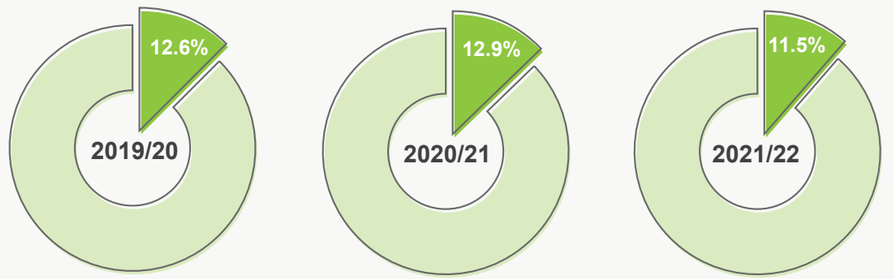
The York Open Data numbers do not account for housing costs whilst the End Child Poverty Coalition figures do. The latest figures from both statistical sources only cover the 2021/22 financial year.

According to the statistics provided by the End Child Poverty Coalition, 19.3% of the city's children were considered to be living in poverty in 2021/22 (Graphic 4).[82] This continues the trend of decreasing child poverty in York over the past few years. The figure was 23.9% in 2019/20 and had decreased to 23.3% in 2020/21. In terms of actual numbers, there were 9,990 children in York living

Graphic 4: Child Poverty in York Before and After Housing Costs (Sources: End Child Poverty Coalition and York Open Data)



End Child Poverty Coalition



York Open Data

in poverty in 2019/20 decreasing to 7,112 children in 2021/22. This decrease is evident in the numbers for both parliamentary constituencies, although there has been a larger reduction in York Outer compared with York Central.

The most recent York Open Data figures, which, as noted above, do not account for housing costs, also indicate a drop in the proportion of children living in poverty in 2021/22, after showing a slight increase between 2019/20 and 2020/21.[83] The figure in 2019/20 was 12.6%. This rose to 12.9% in 2020/21 but then decreased to 11.5% in 2021/22.

Interestingly, the statistics regarding the percentage of primary and secondary schoolchildren who are eligible for free school meals in York, which one might expect to have a correlative relationship with child poverty, tell a different story.

In 2019/20, 11% of primary level schoolchildren in York were eligible for free school meals.[84] This rose to 15.9% in 2022/23. Similarly, if we look at the figures for secondary school children in York, we see that in 2019/20 9% were eligible for free school meals.[85] This number rose to 14.3% in 2022/23.

The reduced figures for child poverty are welcome. However, given that we do not have figures for the 2022/23 period, when the cost-of-living crisis had its greatest impact on households, and given the seemingly contradictory figures regarding the number of children eligible for free school meals, the situation regarding child poverty in York is far from clear. We will therefore keep this issue under close review.

Foodbank Use

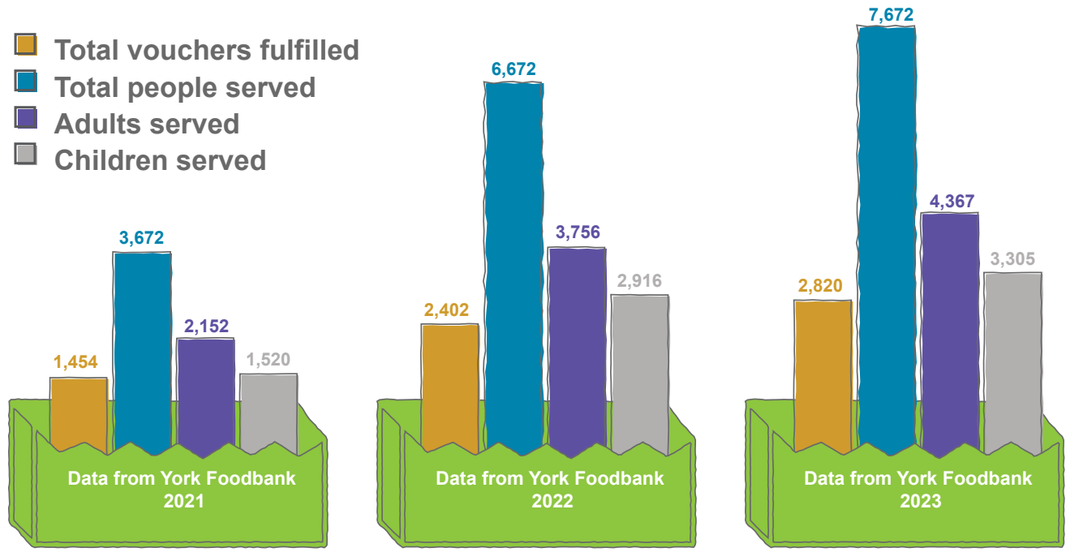
In our 2022 report, we noted the dramatic rise in foodbank use in York compared with the previous year, with a 65.1% increase in the number of food vouchers fulfilled by the York Foodbank, and a 81.7% increase in the total number of people served.[86]

In 2023, the number of people having to make use of the foodbank, run by the Trussell Trust, continues to increase (Graph 5). In 2022, the foodbank fulfilled 2,402 vouchers.[87] This rose to 2,820 in 2023, a 17.4% increase. The total number of people served by the foodbank in 2022 was 6,672. In 2023, the number was 7,672, a 15% increase. The number of children served rose to 3,305 in 2023, up from 2,916 in 2022, a 13.3% increase.

In June of 2023, the Trussell Trust published a report which identified the sections of society that are most likely to experience food insecurity, and the main drivers behind the issue.[88]

The report noted that 69% of those referred to Trussell Trust foodbanks reported that they are disabled.[89]

Graph 5: Foodbank Use (Source: York Foodbank (Trussell Trust))



The number of people in the general population who are disabled is just 26%. The report stated that 68% of the people referred to Trussell Trust foodbanks were in rented accommodation.[90] This compares with 22% in the general population. It also noted that asylum seekers and those who had experience of the care system were overrepresented in food security statistics.[91]

Unsurprisingly, the report stated that people who are referred to foodbanks have extremely low levels of income, and consequently are unable to afford essential items – 89% of those referred to the Trust's foodbanks are receiving means-tested benefits.[92]

According to the report, a key reason why many people struggle to afford essential items, and are driven to using the Trust's foodbanks, is the 'design and delivery of the social security system'.[93] Problems range from the accessibility of information about entitlements,[94] to the waiting periods before claims are approved, with applicants often forced into using foodbanks whilst their claims are being processed.[95]

When people are receiving entitlements, rates are often too low, leaving them unable to afford essentials and forcing them to access foodbanks.

Another report was published in March of 2023 by the York and North Yorkshire Covid Recovery Insight Project.[96] The report is based on research into poverty, commissioned by North Yorkshire County Council and the City of York Council, and

examines the different food access models that are available in order to help combat food insecurity, setting out some of the advantages and disadvantages of each.

The report notes that 'cash-first' approaches, which provide money to those facing food insecurity rather than directly providing food, may be 'the most dignified' model as it affords recipients more independence and control.[97] Voucher models, through which recipients are given vouchers to shop in certain stores, can have wider economic benefits as they can encourage people to purchase food from local vendors. These models can also encourage healthier eating, if the vouchers provided are for stores that sell high quality foods.

Some 'collaborative' models focus on more than simply providing food, offering other support services and education, leading to additional benefits for individuals and the community.[98] Others attempt to develop a community amongst participants, encouraging people to grow food and to cook or eat together. Finally, there are mixed models that incorporate different aspects from the various approaches.[99]

The report, and the research it is based on, provides a basis for further discussion about which food access models, or which aspects of food access models can and do work in York.

Earnings Gap

The earnings gap is the difference in full-time weekly wages, between those earning median wages, and those on low wages, defined as those in the 25th percentile. It is a measure of inequality.

In last year's report, we noted the alarming reduction in the median full-time weekly wage in York, dropping to £622.2, from £637.9 in 2021.[100] In 2023 the figure rebounded quite significantly, rising to £668.7 (Table 4).[101] That's a 4.8% increase over the past three years. However, despite this increase, the median full-time weekly wage is growing at a slower pace in York since 2021 than in Yorkshire and the Humber as a whole (12%), England (11.4%) and the UK (11.8%). The median weekly wage in York is still higher than for Yorkshire and the Humber, but is below the English and UK averages, after being higher than both back in 2021.

In terms of low wages in York, defined as those on the 25th percentile, last year's report noted that there had been a small increase from £443.2 in 2021, to £458.0 in 2022. This number increased significantly in 2023, up to £516.5. That's a 16.5% increase since 2021 and is similar to the rate of increase in the region and nationally. Lower wages in York have almost reached the English and UK average.

Table 4: Earnings Gap in York (Source: Office for National Statistics)

	2021	2021	2021	2022	2022	2022	2023	2023	2023
	Median Full-Time Weekly Wage	25th Percentile	Earnings Gap	Median Full-Time Weekly Wage	25th Percentile	Earnings Gap	Median Full-Time Weekly Wage	25th Percentile	Earnings Gap
York	£637.9	£443.2	**£194.7**	£622.2	£458.0	**£164.2**	£668.7	£516.5	**£152.2**
Yorkshire and the Humber	£563	£424.5	**£138.5**	£588.1	£454.9	**£133.2**	£630.8	£491.3	**£139.5**
England	£613.3	£456.8	**£156.5**	£648.2	£484.4	**£163.8**	£683.5	£519.6	**£163.9**
UK	£609.8	£453.9	**£155.9**	£641.8	£480.8	**£161**	£681.7	£518.5	**£163.2**

As noted, the earnings gap is the difference between the median wage and those on the 25th percentile. The gap has reduced significantly in York over the past three years, dropping from £194.7 down to £152.2, a 21.8% decrease.

This means that, after having an earnings gap that was well above regional and national averages, York's is now lower than the average for England and the UK. However, this good news comes with the caveat that part of the reason for this narrowing gap is that median wages in York have not been doing as well as they have been regionally and nationally.

Universal Credit

In the YHRCN, we have decided to introduce a new indicator into this year's report, the percentage of 16-64 year-olds in York who are claiming Universal Credit.

According to the Office for National Statistics, 1.7% of 16-64 year-olds in York were claiming unemployment related benefits in December 2023, amounting to 2,300 people.[102] That figure is down slightly from 1.8% in December 2022. Of those claimants 1,260 were male, equating to 2% of 16-64 year-old males in York, whilst 1,045 were female, equating to 1.5% of females aged 16-64 in the city.

The overall figure of 1.7% compares favourably with the number for Yorkshire and the Humber as a whole, at 4.1%, and Great Britain, at 3.7%.

However, it should be noted that Universal Credit is not solely directed

towards those who are unemployed. People who are in employment may also claim benefits under the system. The total number of Universal Credit claimants in York has been rising, from 11,553 in December 2022, to 12,774 in December 2023.[103]

According to the Office for National Statistics, in June 2023, 82.8% of 16–64-year-olds living in York were employed, up from 81.6% at the same stage in 2022. This is higher than the regional number, with 72.4% of 16-64-year-olds in Yorkshire and the Humber in employment.

2.1% of people aged 16 or over who were living in York in June 2023 were unemployed, down from 2.4% at that point in the previous year. In Yorkshire and the Humber as a whole that figure decreased from 4.0 to 3.6%.

According to the statistics, 15.7% of York's 16-64-year-old population, around 21,200 people, were economically inactive in 2023. Economically inactive means a person is not employed but does not meet the official criteria for being 'unemployed'. For instance, the person may be retired or may be suffering from a long-term illness. The York figure is lower than the regional figure at 23%, and the figure for Great Britain, which stands at 21.4%.

CASE STUDY: The Cost-of-Living Crisis

2023 saw another year of rapidly rising prices for goods and services, albeit at a slower rate than in 2022. Although the rate of inflation began to decline towards the end of 2023, mainly due to lower energy prices,[104] consumer prices were still 4.6% higher in October 2023 than at the same stage in the previous year.[105]

These price rises could be seen across a range of essential items, putting pressure on low-income families. For instance, the price of food has dramatically increased since the beginning of the cost-of-living crisis. From October 2021 until October 2023 food prices increased by over 28%. It had taken thirteen years for food prices to increase by such an amount prior to the crisis.[106] The rate of food price inflation began to decline during the summer of 2023. However, prices were still 10.1% higher in September of that year than they had been at the same point in 2022.[107]

A large reason behind the rise in inflation since 2021 has been the increase in energy prices, precipitated mainly by the Russia-Ukraine war. 2022 saw a 129% increase in domestic gas prices, accompanied by a 66% increase in electricity prices.[108] There was a welcome decrease in these prices in 2023, with gas prices falling by 31% and electricity prices by 16%. However, the energy price cap, which sets the maximum amount suppliers can charge per unit, was still around 50% higher in October 2023 than it had been at the end of 2021.

According to the University of York Cost of Living Research Group, in April 2023 levels of fuel poverty (where households spend more than 20% of their disposable income on energy) in the UK were above pre-pandemic levels, despite government support such as the Energy Bills Support Scheme.[109] In a survey of York residents, carried out in the Spring of 2023 by Healthwatch York, participants were asked if they had been able to sufficiently heat their home over the winter. 81 out of the 197 who responded stated that they had not.[110]

These price rises have meant that spending power has been hit. Whilst nominal wages have increased significantly in the past year, the Office for Budget Responsibility has predicted that real (i.e., inflation adjusted), post-tax income will

not return to its pre-pandemic level until 2027.[111] According to Healthwatch York, respondents to their survey noted difficulties in meeting expenses, having to reduce spending on non-essential items and socialising less.[112]

Having to cut back like this can impact physical health, if healthy meals cannot be afforded or homes cannot be sufficiently heated. Further, it can impact mental health as worries over bills and a diminished social life can have negative effects. It can also force people into debt. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, amongst households who were in the bottom 40% in terms of income in the UK, one fifth reported borrowing money or using a credit card to pay for essential bills.[113]

When discussing the reasons why people have been impacted by the cost-of-living crisis, many organisations point to the failure of the social welfare system to adequately protect the most vulnerable.

The University of York Cost of Living Research Group identified, in particular, the negative impact of the benefit cap, which limits the amount a household can receive in benefits, and the two-child limit, which means that families may only receive means-tested support for their first two children. According to the group, these policies have a disproportionate effect on households with higher living costs, creating increased hardship during a cost-of-living crisis.[114]

'Can meet bills but not a spare penny. So bad for mental health as there is no pleasure. Spend so much time feeling guilty that I cannot do more with my family.'

Healthwatch York. Health and the Cost of Living in York. October 2023

In response, the research group has called for welfare reform, including the removal of the benefit cap and the two-child limit. Further, they have called for the establishment of the right to a sufficient and secure income, through tying social security rates to the cost of living, and through the removal of the mandatory assessment period for Universal Credit.[115]

The All-Party Parliamentary Group Child of the North have also called for reform of the benefit system in order to protect vulnerable groups during times of economic distress.[116] However, they have said that there is a need to go beyond the social welfare system, in order to provide support to a wider range of groups such as carers and low-income households that are not in receipt of benefits.[117]

Update: The Poverty Truth Commission

The York Poverty Truth Commission aims to bring together people who have experienced poverty, known as Community Commissioners, with city leaders who have the ability to influence change, named Civic Commissioners. By supporting the growth of relationships and trust between these groups, the Commission creates a space where Civic and Community Commissioners can work together to bring about meaningful change.

In 2022, nine Community Commissioners joined the Commission. Over several meetings these individuals were able to share their stories and, through discussion, draw out the challenges, causes, and patterns that had shaped their experience of poverty in York. This process culminated in the Community Commissioners hosting a public event to share their experiences and their work.[118]

In 2023, nine Civic Commissioners joined the Commission, representing key organisations in the city. This included leaders from the City of York Council; the NHS; Joseph Rowntree Foundation; the police and justice system; housing; and the voluntary, community, and social enterprise sector.

Since autumn 2023, the Community and Civic Commissioners have met on a monthly basis to listen to the experiences and insights shared by Community Commissioners and to collectively identify the changes that are needed to benefit those experiencing poverty.

Through this process, the Commission has been able to identify three key priorities that the group will focus on as areas of action. These priorities are:

- To ensure people are treated with kindness, respect and understanding by organisations in York that they have to deal with.
- To ensure any communication from organisations is timely, understandable and focused on helping people to find support and solutions.
- To address the poverty related causes and consequences of digital exclusion.

The Commission is now drawing on the combined knowledge and experience of its members to identify what actions are needed to embed new cultures and practices, and to deliver meaningful change for those experiencing poverty in our city.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Workplace Disparities in York

- **The City of York Council's Economic Partnership should be asked to consider the findings on workplace disparities in the city via it's 'Good Business' Task & Finish Group, including extending an invitation to a representative from the Human Rights and Equalities Board to attend the Task & Finish group meeting.**

The gender pay gap in York is an issue which we have highlighted in a number of our Indicator Reports. This year is no different. Despite the fact the gap has narrowed slightly in 2023, and the fact that some organisations, such as the City Council, have made significant progress internally on this issue,[119] the gender pay gap in the city still remains much higher than regional and national averages. In this year's report, we noted the Fawcett Society's view that the most effective way to narrow the gender pay gap is to ensure that well-paid, secure and flexible work is available. This would make it easier for both women and men to engage in work, whilst also taking care of other parental or caring duties.

The gender pay issue is not the only employment related concern in York. We noted the important work carried out by Inclusive Equal Rights UK in highlighting workplace disparities in the city based on race and ethnicity.

We need to think how we, as a city, can tackle these inequalities. We have noted, in confronting the hate crime issue in the city, that the York Hate Crime Partnership has taken an information-led approach, leading to targeted actions. We have previously reported that a similar approach was taken in tackling the problem of 16–17-year-olds not in education, employment and training.[120]

We believe such an approach should be taken in trying to tackle workplace issues related to gender, race and ethnicity. In their Anti-Racism and Inclusion Strategy, IERUK noted the difficulty in getting some employers in York to provide information about their workforce. It is vital that such information is available so that targeted strategies can be developed. We call on all employers in York to work with the City Council, and civil society groups, in order to gather information about workplace disparities so that these issues can be addressed.

Mental Health Care in York

- **Relevant health agencies in the city should respond to recommendations made by Healthwatch York relating to mental health care, including placing renewed emphasis on adherence to the Mental Health Crisis Care Concordat (a pledge to work towards providing better care for those facing a mental health crisis); to review existing resources and support services; and to review approaches to co-production so that the voices of all relevant parties are heard.**

We have noted in the report the concerns raised over the state of mental healthcare provision in York. We recommend that the relevant agencies, including the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust (which provides mental health services in York); the York and Scarborough Hospital NHS Foundation Trust; the City Council; and the York Health and Care Partnership, consider the recommendations put forward by Healthwatch York in their June 2023 report, entitled, *Breaking Point: A Recent History of Mental Health Crisis Care in York*.

Reflection on the Blue Badge Issue

- **The Human Rights and Equalities Board should attempt to develop a robust consultation and engagement process for the city that can resolve contentious issues in a positive manner, ensuring a range of perspectives are heard, and promoting a culture of collaboration and co-production.**

Undoubtedly one of the biggest human rights-based issues in York in recent years has been the decision to prohibit Blue Badge holders from entering certain parts of the city centre in their vehicles, in response to the terrorist threat to the city.

As we have noted in the report, we commend the work of activists who have worked on this issue, and welcome the decision of the new city administration to reverse the ban.

However, the initial controversial decision to enact the ban led to tensions arising between the City Council and civil society groups in York, our Network included. This tension, at times, made it difficult to reach understandings about how we, as a city, can move forward and develop an approach through which we can resolve contentious issues related to the protection of human rights.

Ensuring such protection is not always easy. In the past few years, the question of the relationship between the city's security and the rights of some of its most vulnerable citizens, raised difficult questions. And, as became clear during this period, human rights law and principles do not always provide a clear answer to such questions. Political discussion and debate are sometimes needed to provide a resolution.

What is important is that we, as a city, find an approach that ensures that such debate is carried out in a constructive manner. We believe that now is a useful time for the City Council, and for ourselves and other groups in the city, to reflect on these issues, and on how to develop such an approach together.

We recommend that, through the relaunched Human Rights and Equalities Board, the Council and other interested parties attempt to develop a consultation process through which future issues can be positively resolved. Such a process should ensure that a range of perspectives are heard on the relevant topic and should promote a culture of collaboration and co-production.

Creating Links with Human Rights Cities

- **YHRCN, the City Council and other relevant parties should organise a national event to share good practice concerning working with human rights and equalities at a city level. One outcome could be the establishment of a network of UK cities that follow human rights principles.**

In April 2023, we hosted Professor Gerd Oberleitner, the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Human Security, from the University of Graz. The Austrian city of Graz became Europe's first human rights city in 2001, and here in York we looked to their experiences when formulating our declaration to become a human rights city. In his talk, Professor Oberleitner discussed the successes of human rights cities throughout Europe, as well as some of the challenges they face.

In late 2022, the City of Swansea declared itself a human rights city, the second UK city to do so after York. We recommend that the City Council, other statutory agencies, and the community and voluntary sector in York, look to learn from the experiences of other human rights cities, and cities that follow human rights principles in their policymaking, in order to see if policies and strategies which have worked elsewhere, may do so in York. It would be particularly useful to create a dialogue with different bodies and organisations in Swansea, as they are likely facing similar challenges in ensuring the protection of human rights as those faced in York.

Child Poverty Truth Commission

- **The city should help support the realisation of a Child Poverty Truth Commission.**

The city's Poverty Truth Commission, which was set up in 2022, has provided an important forum through which residents of the city who have, or who are experiencing poverty, can discuss what the city needs to do to help those on lower incomes. The success of the project has led to discussions about whether a Children's Poverty Truth Commission could be set up in York, in order to give voice to the children in the city who are living in poverty. Such a commission could complement the other important work being done in York regarding children's rights. We therefore recommend that organisations in the city help support the realisation of the project in the coming months and years.

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119. City of York Council: Female staff paid more than male colleagues. The Press. March 18th 2023. Accessed February 5th 2024. Available here: *https://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/23384584.city-york-council-female-staff-paid-male-colleagues/*
120. York Human Rights City Network, Indicator Report 2019, Page 10. Available here: *https://www.yorkhumanrights.org/current-work/human-rights-indicator-report/*

York: Human Rights City

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York Human Rights City Network (YHRCN) is a civil society partnership hosted jointly by York CVS (Centre for Voluntary Service) and the Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR) at the University of York. York CVS roots the Network within York's vibrant civil society. CAHR roots the Network in the human rights discourse. The Network was formed in 2011, and has grown organically over the intervening years. Our Steering Group comprises representatives from civil society organisations working in each of the five priority rights areas. Our aim is to be a catalyst for York people, business and organisations to champion a vibrant, diverse, fair and safe city. We have in the past worked closely with representatives of the public sector in York, most notably the City of York Council, York NHS Teaching Hospital Foundation, Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust, North Yorkshire Police and Explore York.

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