

West Yorkshire Combined Authority scrutiny meeting Friday 23rd January 2026.

There were 13 questions in total from representatives of 5 local authorities, Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield, Kirklees and Calderdale, of which 4 were asked by me, 1 on behalf of Joe Thompson. Each question is detailed below.

Of particular interest are question 1, and question 2. Question 1 looked at the impact of AI (Legal Tech) to well-paid regional jobs, specifically in the legal sector. Here's the extract from the report:

Question 1- Bob Felstead (on behalf of Joe Thompson) on the growth of AI

How do we intend to balance AI growth and advancements to ensure that AI does not adversely affect the creative and other industry sectors?

Within the report we have:

“The LegalTech sector in West Yorkshire is projected to create over 1,800 jobs by 2025, and there has been a 50% increase in LegalTech firms from 2023 to 2024 in the region. In addition to LegalTech firms, the sector has experienced significant growth from within law firms as they increasingly adopt technology to enhance efficiency and service delivery and expand their tech and innovation teams to keep pace with technological advancements.

As part of this, LegalTech remains a high priority for the region. Legal services generate £923m GVA annually for this region, with strong growth potential – particularly within LegalTech and PropTech (property services tech).”

And further, -

“With this, LegalTech is projected to create over 1800 jobs in West Yorkshire with continued innovation and targeting investment, broader legal services could see 4-6% GVA growth.”

Key highlights:

- Leeds ranks among the top 5 UK cities for business expansion (EY).
- 35.5% of executives see financial services as a top UK growth driver (EY).
- West Yorkshire outperforms national averages in high-growth businesses needing financial services support (ONS).
- Strong talent pipeline: Over 1,500 law students and 7,000 studying finance-related subjects (HESA).
- Higher interest rates benefit the region's strong banking and building society presence.
- West Yorkshire leads in FPS-related foreign direct investment, with US firms like Reed Smith and German firms like CMS expanding in Leeds (ONS).

Supplementary question: Strangely, no mention of job creation, so I asked how many jobs had been created, these were not detailed in the report, and how many jobs had been lost. The video is at <https://westyorks-ca.public->

i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/1060819, starting at: 44:49 (mm:ss) and ending 48:50 (mm:ss). I was, as others were, completely taken aback at the answer provided by the mayor.

Question 2 – Bob Felstead, on creative, office and manufacturing workspaces:

The lack of access to creative, office and manufacturing workspace and facilities is referenced and more of an issue in more areas than others (e.g. Calderdale and Bradford). How will you ensure that any expanded space is distributed based on areas in need?

The video is at https://westyorks-ca.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/1060819, starting at 52:00 (mm:ss) and ending 1:02:51 (h:mm:ss).

My supplementary was focussed on Bradford, given that back in 2022/23 a report highlighted that Bradford's economy needed more Grade A office space. Bradford built One City Park, a 60,000 sq foot office block that remains half-full. But had we researched the Grade A market in Bradford, as I have, we would quickly establish that there's currently at least 180,000 sq feet of vacant office space, and that's been the case for years. The HMRC building has been vacant since 2017, others have been on the letting market for up to 5+ years. There's no appetite to invest.

When this was pointed out to the mayor and officers, I had varying responses, the most enlightening of which was from the mayor – **“another great reason for a new rail station in Bradford.”**

At face value, this makes sense, unless you ask the obvious question – **“another good reason”**, which makes me question the basis on which a new rail station is needed. I have asked for further detail and supporting evidence from the combined authority.

The last two questions are on the video from 1:35:00 (h:mm:ss). A couple of quick observations, -

- No private sector representation in “anchor institutions”.
- No awareness of IPOs (Initial Public Offerings – Stock Market floatation's) by members, despite it appearing in the report's finance section.
- Private sector anchor institutions need to play a key role in cluster action plans and finance – as I have suggested.