

**PREPARING FOR CHANGE:**

# **2026 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN WEST YORKSHIRE**

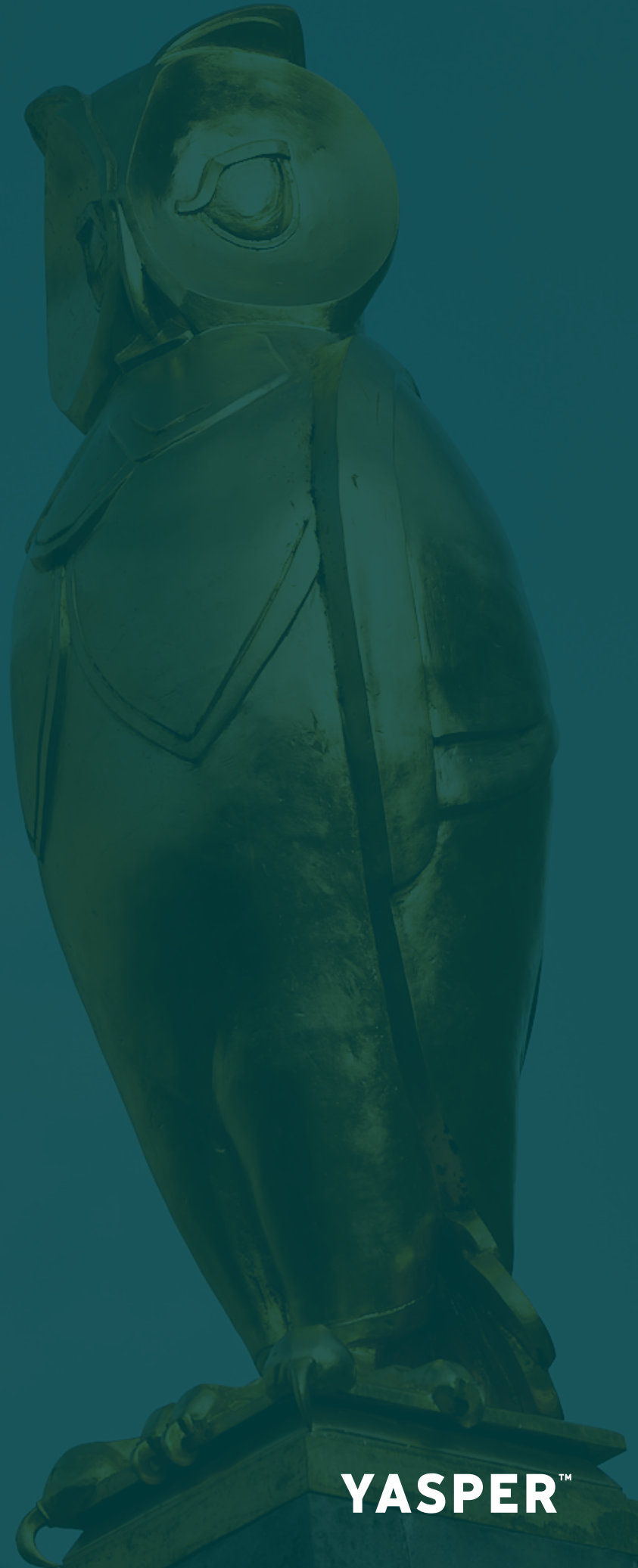
**An insight report from YASPER**



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Local elections are always an interesting proposition. They can act as a bellwether for the national political landscape and go some way to telling a picture of the mood of the country. But usually, the change we see in practice is limited. However, 2026 is different.

As most local authorities stagger their elections, change is often limited and predicated on the timing of the last election cycle for those seats. Often, only one seat per ward is elected at any one time, meaning that at most, a third of the council is up for election.

By contrast, in West Yorkshire this year, four out of the five local authorities have all of their ward councillors up for election. This includes the full 63 seats in Wakefield, 69 seats in Kirklees, 54 seats in Calderdale, and 90 in Bradford. In addition, one-third of Leeds members are facing the vote.

## **Put succinctly, we could see some big changes.**

Not only does a frankly febrile political landscape mean that the national picture will influence voter's decision-making more than ever, but we are also facing a high probability of massive change being on the cards.

What also needs to be taken to account is how these results will be interpreted on a national level. Yes, thousands of council seats will be decided, and numerous councils will change hands in terms of their leadership, but the national news narrative will be very much focused on the 'winners' and 'losers', and what that could mean if played out at a national level (even if a general election is still three years away).

What can be done to prepare for local elections?



**By Julian Pearce**  
Founder of Jasper.

Pretending they won't have an impact is akin to burying your head in the sand. Change will be felt, and individuals need to take responsibility that their vote will collectively result in the future direction of their area.

From a business perspective, the choices – and changes – will be starker, and felt more rapidly. As such, preparing for change is crucial. While it might be easy to be dismissive of the impact the election results could have on a business, it's important to try and understand what the future landscape might be and prepare accordingly.

Take the property industry, for example. Work might have been done to bring elected members on side about a development, only for those individuals making the decisions to change overnight. New members might be less familiar with the planning system, and as such they may have more questions, or bias. The work already done – over years in some cases – could be undone in one fell swoop.

This insight report seeks to measure the scale of potential change that could be felt in West Yorkshire and equip businesses of all sizes with the tools they need to act.

As voters in West Yorkshire and across Great Britain head to the polls on 7 May, Sir Keir Starmer will be waiting for the results in 10 Downing Street rather anxiously.

Local elections in the mid term of a Parliament are always a chance to give the Government of the day a kicking, but these could have more significance than most.

Labour faces losing power in Wales for the first time since devolution, while historic councils in Yorkshire that have voted red for generations like Bradford and Barnsley could go as well.

**The fate of the Prime Minister hangs in the balance. Less than two years after a historic general election win, his party is languishing in the polls.**

Sir Keir has been dogged by scandals during his time in No10, the most damaging of which was his appointment of Lord Peter Mandelson as US ambassador.

As the US Department of Justice published the Epstein files, his close ties and friendship to the paedophile financier became abundantly clear.

The peer is now being investigated by the Metropolitan Police for misconduct in public office.

Sir Keir was warned about the potential of Lord Mandelson posing a "reputational risk", as well as his friendship with Jeffrey Epstein, yet he still appointed him.

This has called into question his judgement and character, with the Labour leader in Scotland Anas Sarwar already calling on the Prime Minister to resign.

This is why the local elections matter enormously to Sir Keir's future.

Some Labour backbenchers have already warned that a poor result could be terminal.

Jon Trickett, the left-wing MP for Normanton and Hemsworth, told me: "The May elections, this is a big moment and I think the Government will have to come to a judgement if those elections are as difficult as the polls are currently saying.

"If we don't make a change and the May elections are bad then I really think the Government will have to change in a very significant way, and Keir Starmer will have to look in the mirror."

Other Labour MPs are currently keeping their powder dry, but speak to them behind closed doors and they will tell you 7 May is pivotal.

Defeat in Scotland, losing Wales and Reform taking over swathes of the North would be the touchpaper from which Sir Keir may not recover.



**By Ralph Blackburn**

Westminster Correspondent for The Yorkshire Post.

# Bradford

West Yorkshire's second biggest metropolitan area is a district of contrasts. From the flowing hills and valleys of Skipton through to the densely packed urban areas of inner-city Bradford, the area has seen more change than most over the past 200 years.

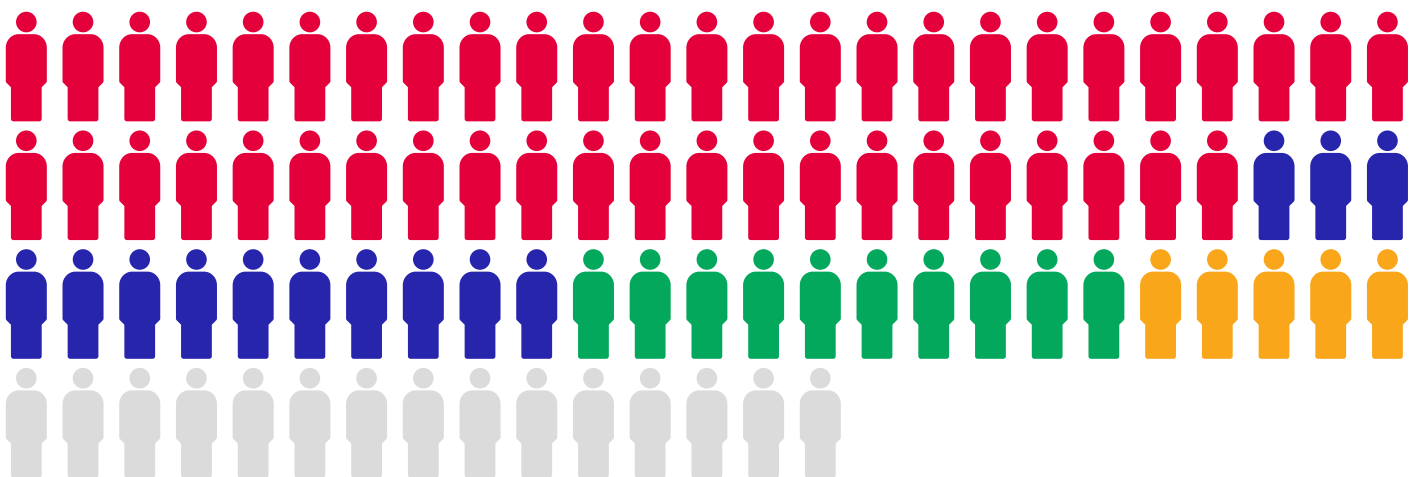
The council has fluctuated between a Labour majority and 'no overall control' since 1980, but more recently, there has been political stability with the Labour administration in charge since 2014. 2025 saw Bradford under the spotlight, with City of Culture shining a welcome focus on the area.



**Number of seats: 90**

**Proportion of seats up for election: 100%**

**Current majority: Labour**



Red = Labour: 47 seats

Blue = Conservative: 13 seats

Green = Green Party: 10 seats

Gold = Liberal Democrat: 5 seats

Grey = Other: 15 seats

# Calderdale

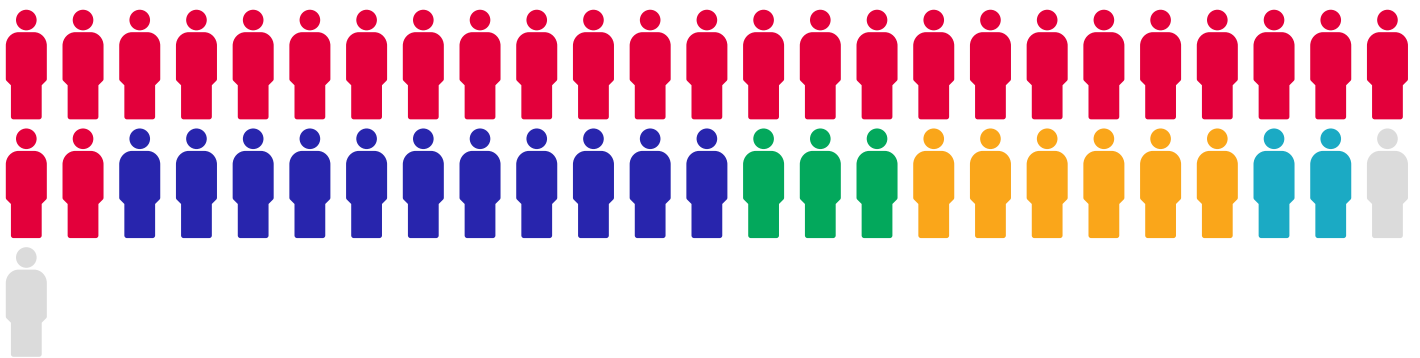
While Halifax is the biggest town and administrative centre of Calderdale, there is more to the district than meets the eye. Home to the iconic Grade II listed Piece Hall, the area is also famed for its financial services expertise and wider cultural offering.

The valley towns of Elland, Hebden Bridge and Mytholmroyd also offer a more quintessentially Yorkshire feel and tourism is becoming increasingly important in this part of the world. A forward-looking district, Calderdale has been Labour red since 2019, but has also had Conservative majorities in recent years.

**Number of seats: 51**

**Proportion of seats up for election: 100%**

**Current majority: Labour**



Red = Labour: 27 seats

Blue = Conservative: 11 seats

Green = Green Party: 3 seats

Gold = Liberal Democrat: 6 seats

Light Blue = Reform: 2 seats

Grey = Other: 2 seats

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# Kirklees

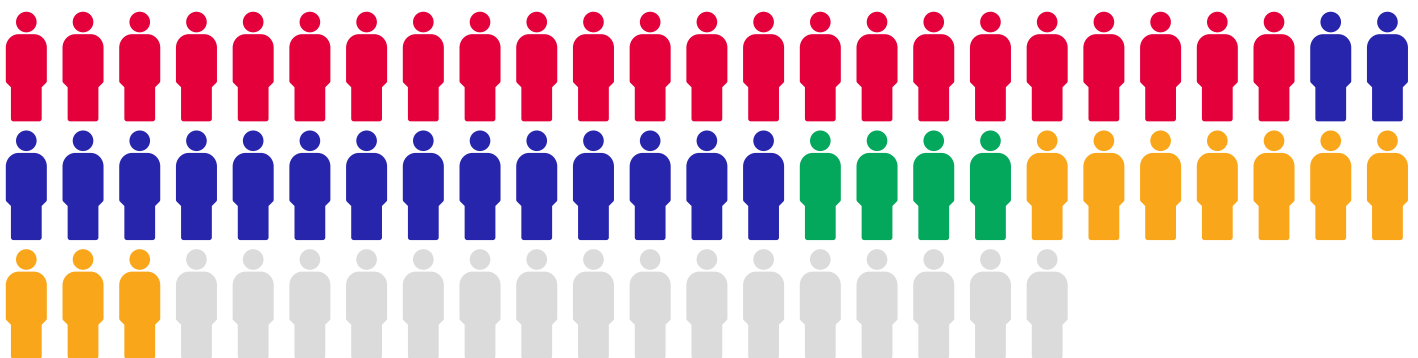
With its rich textile heritage, Kirklees is at a crossroads. Bridging the gap between urban and rural, the administrative centre of Huddersfield boasts a world-class University, and the town's connectivity has been given a boost by recent Trans Pennine rail upgrades. With the town centre undergoing significant regeneration, Huddersfield can benefit from its near equidistant status between Leeds and Manchester.

Historically fluctuating between Labour and 'no overall control', the local politics in Kirklees are fascinating and 2026 should provide a stern test for all candidates.

**Number of seats: 69**

**Proportion of seats up for election: 100%**

**Current majority: No overall control  
(Labour largest party)**



Red = Labour: 23 seats

Blue = Conservative: 16 seats

Green = Green Party: 4 seats

Gold = Liberal Democrat: 10 seats

Grey = Other: 16 seats

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# Leeds

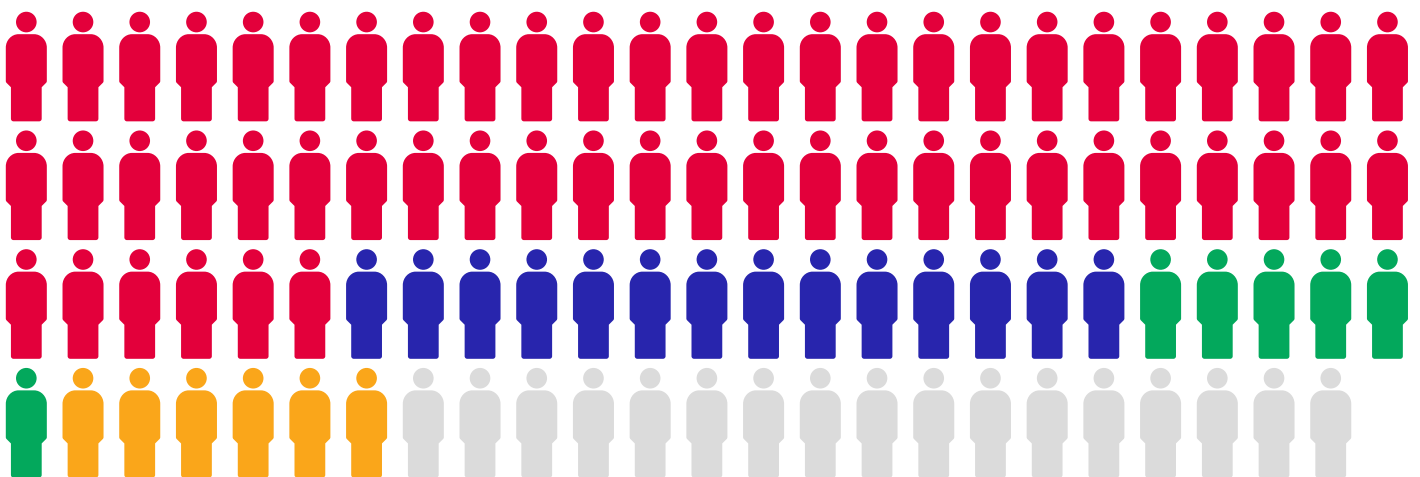
With a district population nearing 1m, Leeds is an economic powerhouse. With a complex mix of employment sectors and an expanding urban centre, Leeds ranks as one of the UK's largest and most desirable city locations. However, as a district with large rural areas, it is often ranked as one of the greenest cities in the UK.

With just a third of councillors up for election, Leeds is the West Yorkshire outlier in 2026. However, more than half of those seats up for election are currently held by Labour, which could spell danger for the ruling party.

**Number of seats: 99**

**Proportion of seats up for election: 33%**

**Current majority: Labour**



Red = Labour: 56 seats

Blue = Conservative: 14 seats

Green = Green Party: 6 seats

Gold = Liberal Democrat: 6 seats

Grey = Other: 17 seats

# Wakefield

Another of West Yorkshire's cultural capitals, Wakefield has undergone a renaissance over recent decades. Home to the Hepworth Gallery and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, the city also benefits from being a key station on the East Coast Mainline, with excellent links not only to neighbouring Leeds, but also connecting into London in under 2 hours.

Technically Labour's safest council in West Yorkshire, with 49 out of 63 seats held, the 'all out' nature of this election could mean that all bets are off. Seeing Wakefield turn from Labour red, even to 'no overall control' would spell panic stations at a national level.

**Number of seats: 63**

**Proportion of seats up for election: 100%**

**Current majority: Labour**



Red = Labour: 49 seats

Blue = Conservative: 1 seat

Green = Green Party: 2 seats

Gold = Liberal Democrat: 2 seats

Light Blue = Reform: 2 seats

Grey = Other: 8 seats

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The potential for change in West Yorkshire is unparalleled in recent memory. But this is just a part of the picture.

Looking wider, all seats are up for election in Barnsley, while one-third of those in Sheffield and Hull are also up for grabs.

There is also huge potential for change beyond Yorkshire. Around the country, there's a total of 5,014 seats up for election, across 136 local authorities. Other authorities that have all their councillors up for election include major cities such as Birmingham and Newcastle.

Of the 16 Metropolitan Boroughs with all councillors up to election, 14 are currently held by Labour. However, this could be a chastening year for the Conservatives as well, having already suffered massive losses in the 2024 General Election.

A typical trend would suggest that the party of national Government can expect significant losses in a local election cycle, and if that pattern rings true, there will be major changes in play after 7th May.

So what does the potential for political change mean for councils and their residents? In all the authorities that have all of their councillors up for election in West Yorkshire (plus Barnsley), Labour is the largest party and has effective control of those councils. This means that they get the ultimate say over how services are run and priorities arrived at.

If we do see a change of ruling party in any of those areas, we could see quite significant shifts in direction, usually in line with national policy. One of the quirks of the local government system is that there is often relatively rigid adherence to national party allegiance. While there might be local factors at play, you can see a sense of direction from the party-line and ideology at a Westminster level.

Will bins still be emptied? Absolutely. Will social care provision still be honoured in the near-term? Yes. But over time, residents will see a tangible difference to the services they receive, based on the choices they make.

How local councils interact within the wider electoral system – for example Mayoral Combined Authorities – will also be impacted.

Outside of General Elections, the local polls in May could be one of the most impactful votes we've seen in recent years.

With wider reorganisation of local government in the pipeline, it had originally been mooted that around 60 of the planned elections would be postponed. However, with that decision having been ruled potentially unlawful, the number of seats up for grabs has increased by around 25%, with very little notice.

Local politics can be confusing at the best of times, but if recent history has taught us anything, it is to wait until the dust has settled before casting judgement. Narratives often shift at short notice, and it is only when we are in possession of the full facts that we will see the true picture, but it's clear that being up to speed with potential changes offers competitive advantage.

**To speak to Jasper's experts about what change could mean for your business, drop us an email: [hello@jasper.agency](mailto:hello@jasper.agency)**

## About Jasper

Jasper is a communications agency, backed by experience. We adopt a geography and tactic agnostic approach to the briefs we work on, underpinned by a commitment to deliver value to our clients.

Our services include media relations, stakeholder engagement, marketing, and digital communications. For more information on this report, additional analysis of the two areas, or to hear more about our work, please contact us below.



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