

Voluntary sector questions for Metro Mayor: Stephen Williams answers

I most certainly value the work done in the region by the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. I have worked with dozens of organisations in my time as a councillor and an MP. While I was Communities Minister in the last government I also worked with various national voluntary groups and put in policies to promote the role of social enterprises. The sector is often able to deliver services in a more holistic way than the state. To give examples that I have seen locally (with Aspire and Bristol Together) and in my work as a minister, the renovation of empty homes by a social enterprise or the provision of maintenance work, can give opportunities for people trapped in long term unemployment or dysfunctional lives. The service outcome is also positive, so a virtuous circle is created. In my Regional Mayor manifesto (seehttp://www.stephenwilliams.org.uk/mayor_manifesto) I say that I want to boost the role of social enterprises, in particular to deliver an ambitious programme of house building and renovation. I also intend to use part of the economic development fund to allocate office space for social enterprises.

As Mayor I will make myself accessible to all communities across the region. I will go well beyond the statutory requirement for scrutiny by a panel of councillors. I will ask each of the three councils to facilitate procedures for oral and written questions from all councillors. I will also want sessions where the public can ask questions. These can be facilitated by the councils and also by other organisations, including those from the VCSE sector.

The West of England is the most prosperous region in England outside London. I want to make sure that the prosperity and the opportunities arising from further growth are shared more fairly, geographically and socially. My transport plans will give better links for south Bristol and the towns and villages around both cities for the job opportunities in north Bristol and central Bath. I will use control of the adult skills budget to tackle gender imbalances in apprentice places, for instance in engineering and construction. I will also promote BAME owned businesses and work with large employers to recruit a more diverse workforce.

In the first year as Mayor I would hope to start off my plans for a transport revolution. I would begin to franchise bus services, ensuring that the operators run services in line with passenger priorities. I will switch them to cashless payment, speeding up journeys, cutting congestion and improving air quality. I

will also bring together all our local political leaders, whatever their party affiliation, to put together a plan for more devolution from central government.