

# Whose deal is it anyway? - A reply to 'Dear mayoral candidate' by Tabitha Morton, Women's Equality Party Mayoral Candidate

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In the wake of the horrible death of Jo Cox last year, newspapers started reporting the work and achievements of the new and rather low-profile Labour MP. It turned out that people knew very little, if anything, about the phenomenal work of Cox – just as we know little of countless other MPs and local councillors who get out of bed every morning determined to make this world a better place. We don't learn about them through the news. We don't teach our children about them in school. Because in our politics and in our history, it is the figurehead that matters.

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teach our children about them in school. Because in our politics and in our history, it is the figurehead that matters.

The devolution deal for Liverpool City Region is yet another example of this practice in action. It was signed by our local figureheads to create an office for another figurehead. This is understandable, given the national political landscape, but also exposes the limits of our entire political system.

I don't need to add that our devolution deal was signed by a line-up of white, able-bodied, mostly older men. This deal is built on their realities, within a political imagination limited by a narrow spectrum of experience – and in doing so it fails to reflect our city region in all its diversity. This doesn't just mean the disenfranchisement of whole communities, from Halton to St Helens, it means our entire regions suffers. It set in motion a process that whilst designed to bring people into decision making, has once more cast them out. And the risk is that the implementation of the deal and the future negotiations with central government will suffer from the same lack of diversity – by the quality of ideas brought to the table, and by virtue of those voices left behind.

That is what I want to change.

We may need a figurehead on the national level by having one voice, one person, fighting the fight on our behalf, ensuring we get the most out of devolution. But it doesn't mean we need to replicate that locally. The Mayor needs to show from day one that she (or he) is fit for the job by bringing to the table people from all our communities, of all genders, classes and racial or ethnic backgrounds; of diverse ages and disability statuses. That is the only way forward.

I am standing for metro mayor on behalf of the Women's Equality Party because I know that things will not change automatically and that our project of building up a flourishing city region will fail unless we manage to bring in the voices of the many.

It is this monotonous thinking that has brought us a devolution deal that focuses on physical infrastructure of roads and buildings but neglects the social infrastructure that underpins our economy's success. It is the monotony that puts focus on skills and training but forgets to create jobs and earning opportunities that can be shared by all. And it is this monotony that tells women to participate fully in our workplaces, but fails to offer them solutions to the sky-high costs of childcare that mean it often doesn't pay to work.

And this brings me to the Women's Equality Party's one-point plan for social justice, a flourishing economy and women's liberation: universal childcare.

You might ask: what on earth does universal childcare have to do with social justice and the economy?

To which my answer is: everything.

Investing in the social infrastructure is equally good to our economy as building roads and bridges. And as a matter of fact, investing in care has more derived job than the traditional, 'job creation' investments in physical infrastructure. Carefully estimated, our plan for universal childcare in the Liverpool City Region will create 40,000 new jobs, out of which 12,000 will be generated from the supplying industries and as the result of increased consumption. This will boost the economy, significantly increase social mobility, reduce unemployment, give businesses access to a wider talent pool, reduce staff turnover and put thousands of pounds in families' pockets, making them less dependent on ever-decreasing benefits. The increased economic activity will give us more opportunities to build up a physical, social and digital infrastructure that works for all of us.

Currently, a quarter of our children are living under poverty line. If this does not demand action and now, I don't know what does. And universal childcare is one of the most effective means to tackle child poverty and to reduce the development gap between poor children and their peers.

On 4th May we will be voting about prioritisation, about whether we want our city region to be built up by cement alone or if we want our social infrastructure to be just as strong. I believe we need both. I will also work tirelessly toward an integrated transport network that works for all of us and to build solutions to the housing crisis *before* it gets completely out of hand as it has done in other parts of our country.

I will aim at a sustainable and inclusive economic growth that values the paid and unpaid care work that lays the foundations for our success. I am also the only candidate who has so far committed to ending the most pervasive human rights violations of our times: violence against women and girls. Because while 100 women call the police for help every day, we have no city region wide strategy to protect them.

You have two votes on 4th May. Use them to put fresh ideas at the top of the agenda. Give your first vote to social justice and equality.

*Tabitha Morton*

*Mayoral candidate for the Women's Equality Party*