

# A business manifesto for the West of England Mayor Election on 4 May 2017



In 2017, the West of England enters into an exciting phase of devolution which will see the region gain additional powers of housing, transport, skills and strategic planning, as well as an additional £900m in funding from central government over the next 30 years. The establishment of the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and the election of a new West of England Mayor open up the debate about where the region goes and how it gets there. We want to see these opportunities capitalised upon in full to ensure that the West of England remains the best place to live and work. This 10 point manifesto sets out the level of ambition the West of England should be aiming for in order to make a success of devolution.

We call on the West of England Mayor to:



**1. Set out a vision for sustainable growth that is ambitious, innovative and inclusive.**

In this changing political landscape, the West of England Mayor must articulate a plan for inclusive growth – encompassing economic, social and environmental concerns – that will steer the region along an ambitious, sustainable and resilient trajectory for the next four years and beyond.



**2. Establish a formal role for the business community to provide support and advice to strengthen the region's growth plans and delivery.**

Businesses in the West of England care deeply about the region: we want this to be the best place to live and work. The West of England's voice will be stronger with businesses standing shoulder to shoulder with the new Mayor in advocating for our region.



**3. Demonstrate leadership with a clear vision and collaborative approach.**

Devolution provides a formal context for collaboration between the three unitary authorities, as well as local businesses and local communities; the West of England Mayor must lead WECA as a smart communicator and negotiator who can broker agreements, negotiate compromises and work across party interests to unify the local area.



**4. Present the public with a coherent strategy and timeline for the objectives to be achieved within the first term.**

It is vital that the public are engaged with the devolution process and enthused about the opportunities that it can bring to the region; the Mayor must clearly present their plan for the West of England and ensure it has wide public appeal.



**5. Reduce intra-regional inequality and unemployment by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to gain appropriate skills to enter into the labour market.**

Devolution allows the local skills system to be more closely in tune with the needs of the local economy; the Mayor should work with the business community, LEP, universities, colleges and other stakeholders to deliver a skills plan that fully addresses local business need.



**6. Drive investment into our digital infrastructure to meet the needs of public, commercial, educational and R&D uses.**

The West of England is home to a significant tech and creative cluster which brings promising opportunities for growth and employment; the Mayor should focus on increasing regional connectivity and draw upon the region's digital capacity to solve local issues



**7. Promote the West of England nationally and internationally as the best place to live and work.**

We need a Mayor who is confident to promote the West of England on a national and international stage, bolstering the region's status and attracting additional investment opportunities. The Mayor needs to be a powerful figurehead – confident in Whitehall and Westminster and able to speak with the same gravitas and authority as the other Metro Mayors across England.



**8. Set out a clear strategy for reducing road congestion and improving public transport in the West of England.**

The transportation system in the West of England is simply not fit for purpose and has a profound negative impact on the quality of life for people living here. The Joint Transport Plan sets out an ambitious strategy to reform the transportation network in the region and the Mayor needs to take decisive steps to deliver on this. This includes a strong, independently resourced, Integrated Transport Authority with a cross region data management centre.



**9. Produce an action plan within the first 100 days setting out a bold strategy to solve the regional housing crisis within a generation.**

Housing pressures are rising steeply in the West of England and there is a growing affordability gap, with the cost of housing increasing at a faster rate than local wages. The West of England Mayor must take decisive action to raise the planned levels of housing within the Joint Spatial Plan such that it has a meaningful impact on housing affordability.



**10. And finally to set out an ambitious plan for additional powers and responsibilities to be devolved from Westminster in 'Devo 2' and beyond.**

Devolution is an ongoing process, not a one-time deal; the Mayor should see this first devolution agreement as a catalyst for gaining even more local control over how the region is governed and resourced.

Business West is the Chambers of Commerce & Initiative for Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Bath & North East Somerset and the local voice of business

**The new West of England Mayor will be elected on 4 May 2017**



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**For more information on devolution, including our business challenge, visit: [www.businesswest.co.uk/west-of-england-devolution](http://www.businesswest.co.uk/west-of-england-devolution)**

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