



**REPORT TO WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY
ECONOMY TASK GROUP - BRISTOL WOMEN'S COMMISSION**

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The Caring Economy - Who Cares Wins event in October 2022 brought together: Childcare and social care providers paid and unpaid; City of Bristol College; city council policy makers; grassroots and women's groups; Parenting in the Pandemic community researchers; political representatives; organisers from March of the Mummies; receivers of care; university researchers - **Coming together in solidarity with one another for investing in the Caring Economy**

What do we mean by the Caring Economy?

The Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy led by the Women's Budget Group with input across the UK from gender budgeting experts, organisations working on poverty/discrimination, grassroots activists and local decision makers - developed an economic vision, with strategies, to further equality between women and men. The Commission's final report defines the vision as "**A Caring Economy**" which:

- Has the wellbeing of individuals, communities and the planet at its centre
- Values the care that nurtures us all - paid and unpaid
- Ensures that no one faces discrimination, violence, or poverty.

Bristol Women's Commission has picked up the mantle along with our sponsors – City of Bristol College, Fair Play South West - the Women's Equality Network, Bristol Women's Voice and the University of Bristol. Together we believe that investing in care will further the delivery of an inclusive, fair and functioning economy that the West of England Authority and Bristol's One City Plan aspire to.

Bristol Women's Commission's Economy Task Group's Vision of a Caring Economy

- **Is a thriving economy with childcare and social care at its heart:** That boosts women's place within the economy and supports better access to training and skills, professional development, and continuity in employment
- **Invests in people of all ages. Invests in children's early years** – that they thrive in their social, physical and creative development giving children a better, more equal start in life
- **Invests in levelling up** – we know that in the most marginalised areas of the city where unemployment is highest and educational advancement and social mobility lowest that it is harder to get a childcare place especially one you can afford; it's harder to get to work because bus services can be so poor so if you are caring for a relative or your children you can't manage your day; it's harder to get out and about if you are disabled and rely on care; it's harder for parents to get support for children with SEND needs

- **Economic policies are centred on growth at the moment – but where is the growth and who benefits? Caring economics invests in childcare, nursery care, social care that includes paid and unpaid carers, transport, well-being, training and skills; rewards those who work in the caring economy rather than so many having to rely on low wages and food banks**
- **Caring economics creates more new jobs in the care sectors than a similar investment in physical infrastructure.** But these jobs need to be well paid. We need more workers in the care sectors. However many are on their knees. Wages and recognition of skills are so poor at the moment that the childcare and social care infrastructure is in serious decline
- **Caring Economics furthers productivity enabling more women to take up and remain in employment across all sectors,** advance their professional development, and access training and skills – with the support of flexible working conditions that give time to care – this is what productivity is about
- **Creates new employment opportunities** – if there is childcare and social care support, women will be more able to join in furthering the green economy, environmental sustainability, renewable energy
- **Health and care services employ the highest number of workers in Bristol,** over and above retail, hospitality financial services and manufacturing and yet the health and care sectors get barely any recognition for their contribution to the local economy in spite of the contribution women and black and ethnic minority communities make to holding the economy together as we saw in the pandemic; in spite of the contribution those working in the caring economy make in taxes they pay. Meanwhile private equity companies, registered overseas and paying little UK tax extract annual profits of over £1.5 billion from residential care for elderly people. With no investment in training low paid care staff, this is far from “trickle down”.
- **Caring economics invest in sharing care more equally in the family.** Invests in women and men who are carrying the burden of care – the invisible army. Enables those who are cared for to have greater choice in their lives
- **Above all caring economics invests in well being and life chances, reducing poverty and improving health, increasing life expectancy**

Bristol Women’s Commission proposes that the West of England Authority and Bristol City Council adopt the caring economy as a strategic driver for investment. Both authorities have wide ranging responsibility for public services, training, skills, transport, environmental sustainability and for those disadvantaged by poverty and discrimination. The test is how are ambitions rolled out in practice by all decision makers including national government, how are we measuring improvements, addressing challenges? What we cannot change locally and regionally needs local and regional government to campaign for at a national level.

THE CARING ECONOMY: WHO CARES WINS

1. IMPROVED WORKING CONDITIONS INCLUDING TIME TO CARE

- Support Time to Care, recognising the contribution of unpaid carers many of whom are older women
- Accreditation for the Real Living Wage in the West of England Authority's Good Employment Charter for all employers
- Work to ensure that no contracts are granted to providers without these protections

2. EMPLOYMENT IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

- Welcome the focus on health and social care as an area for investment given it employs the highest number of people in the region and the high level of vacancies
- Raise the profile of social care and childcare workers, the majority of whom are women, when investing in training and up-skilling

3. CHILDCARE

- Establish a high level West of England Combined Authority Working Group on Childcare that includes research on the impact on more deprived areas
- Ensure new employment, training and regeneration developments, including the Shared Prosperity Fund, guarantee the provision of childcare

4. TRAINING AND SKILLS

- Include support for childcare and other caregiving responsibilities in all training programmes
- Research the impact of caring responsibilities on availability for employment
- Support innovative training models in under-represented communities – eg. City of Bristol College seeking to locate a training centre for nursery nurses in South Bristol College
- Retain care workers by supporting career and pay progression, investing in affordable education and training without age limits. Lobby for retention of the BTech in Health and Social Care, an excellent model under threat

5. INVESTMENT

- Include childcare as infrastructure in West of England Combined Authority's Industrial Strategy.
- Unlock innovation by funding new caring initiatives in local communities
- Lobby nationally for investment in free childcare as economic infrastructure reinforcing the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill.

6. TRANSPORT

- Understand and address the current working conditions of bus drivers that militate against many women taking up the role, including childcare, time to care working conditions, safety and toilet facilities