

**Speech by Councillor Sylvia Anginotti, Cabinet Member for Employment and Enterprise, Sheffield City Council to the “Female Entrepreneurs Celebrating Achievements Event – Sheffield, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

I would like to begin by saying thank you to Inova for inviting me to speak at this event and to be a part of celebrating the achievements of female entrepreneurs.

It is taking place at a time when reports by both the United Nations and the UK's own Equality and Rights Commission paint a gloomy picture about the situation of women in Britain today.

Reports which show a Britain in which discrimination against women is rife and the progress towards achieving equality in the number of women in positions of power and influence in politics, in business, in the private and public sector is actually going backwards.

I found the way in which the report from the Equality and Rights Commission measured progress for women in breaking through the glass ceiling to be extremely interesting. I don't know if you have read the report but let me share some of it with you. At current rates women will achieve equality with men in the judiciary in 55 years. They will achieve equality in the top jobs in FTSE companies in 73 years and in they will achieve equality in Parliament in 212 years.

But this shouldn't come as a real surprise to anyone. Because as you all know the odds are stacked against women. Whichever piece of research you care to read it shows quite clearly that in the United Kingdom men are twice as likely to start a business as women. Sadly that is the same in the Yorkshire and Humberside region and in addition the rate of entrepreneurship among women has fallen significantly below the national average.

But we are not here to complain about the injustice of it all. We are here to celebrate success. Because each and every woman in this room who has become an entrepreneur is a successful woman in her own right.

There are some, usually men, who might say “Well does it really matter whether women become entrepreneurs or not?” Well you all know that it matters. And you know why it matters for you.

I'm not a great believer in quoting endless statistics to prove a point. But I saw some in a report from a recent survey of 1,000 women entrepreneurs and it showed that 70% of the women started their own business because they wanted more flexible working conditions. 75% said work life balance is better when you are running your own business. 78% said they gained greater independence when they became entrepreneurs and 66% have enjoyed increased confidence.

So it certainly matters for women. But it matters for everyone in Sheffield and it matters for the rest of the region as well. Enterprise and entrepreneurship is a crucial component in creating a strong economy. And we don't do it as well as we need to in Sheffield and in the wider South Yorkshire region and we need to encourage enterprise and entrepreneurship across the city irrespective of gender or age or ethnicity or social status.

So we have to recognise that the levels of entrepreneurship among women are way too low and we need to take specific and targeted action to increase them.

I am very encouraged by what is going on already within Creative Sheffield and in BiG and by the work that Inova is doing. But we have to do more. And the City Council has to play its part in that by acting as an enabler and a facilitator to bring the key partners and stakeholders across Sheffield together to see how we can help to unlock the full potential of women as entrepreneurs.

That is why, ahead of this event, I put a proposal forward at the meeting of the City Council last week about the need to do more to increase entrepreneurship among women. A proposal that I am pleased to tell you received unanimous support from all the members of the city council. A proposal that is now the policy of the city council.

What that policy does is recognise that women make up half the population of Sheffield and that half the students at Universities in Sheffield are female. But despite the fact that girls outperform boys at school women are only half as likely to start a business or become self employed.

And so it commits the City Council to work with others to address that gap and to make Sheffield an outstanding place for women to succeed as entrepreneurs and in business. Not just a good place, but an **outstanding** place.

But I actually want to go further than that. I want to make it the best place not just in the UK but in Europe in which women can become entrepreneurs and thrive and prosper in business.

And I want to do this because it is in the best interests of everyone in Sheffield for us to succeed. Not just for the economy but to give women the confidence and self-belief to succeed wherever they decide to put their skills and talents.

I realise that striving to be the best in Europe is a very tall order and a massive challenge. But we have to set our aims high and do everything possible to achieve them. As Marina says "Many of the women in our programme have achieved so much in a short time. So much that I have faith when we all work together we have the ability of making things happen."

So we have to all have to work together and, where necessary, build confidence and self-belief and raise aspirations in women in order to succeed.

And that is why I look forward to the report I have asked the City Council's officers to produce in cooperation with partners across the city, and most crucially of all women who have actually found that self-confidence and self-belief to become entrepreneurs, on how we can best achieve our ambitions. And, although I haven't told the officers officially yet, I want them to look at working with partners to put on a conference in Sheffield in 2009 to which we invite women entrepreneurs, and maybe a few men, from across the world to come to Sheffield and share their experiences with us and for us to show them what we've got and what we want to achieve.

So I want to close by once again saying thank you for inviting me and thank you all for what you have done and for what you have achieved and I hope you will join me in our campaign to make Sheffield an outstanding place for women to succeed as entrepreneurs.