



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

Minutes from Executive Oversight Committee held on 18th February, 2014

Present

Cllr. Jim McMahon – Leader, Oldham (Chair CCIN, EOC)
Cllr. Tudor Evans – Leader, Plymouth (CCIN, Deputy Chair)
Cllr. Shaun Davies – Cabinet Member, Telford and Wrekin (CCIN, EOC)
Cllr. Nigel Todd – Cabinet Member, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (CCIN, EOC)
Paul Wheeler (RSA)
Atif Shafique (RSA)
Jackie Wilson (Head of Co-operatives, Policy and Partnerships, Oldham Council)
Jonathan Downs (Policy Officer, Oldham Council)

Apologies

Cllr. Sharon Taylor – Leader, Stevenage (CCIN, EOC)
Cllr. Lib Peck – Leader, Lambeth (CCIN, EOC)

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed representatives to the meeting and reported the above apologies.

2. Notes of the last meeting of the EOC held on 21st November, 2013

The notes were agreed as a correct record with matters arising discussed below:

Labour Party Conference

At the last meeting it was agreed that: – *‘the Network be represented at the Labour Party Conference and work is prioritised to establish effective working relationships with leading think-tanks etc.’*

Paul Wheeler updated that this could not now happen as the Labour Party had been singularly unhelpful in helping the CCIN organise a separate event at the Labour Party Conference. As Plymouth were running a session at the Conference, Tudor suggested that he would mention the CCIN to ensure the Network was promoted.

International Co-operative Alliance

At the last meeting it was agreed that *‘the Network use the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) values as those of the Network’.*

Tudor reported that his Authority had strong connections with the ICA and suggested that it may be beneficial to build stronger links with them in respect of areas of potential collaboration, funding or other resources. Plymouth would be happy to share its contacts with the Network or potentially facilitate a formal meeting with them (virtually or at the Plymouth Network Meeting).

Tudor also reported on discussions with the Co-operative College, located in Manchester, who were keen to be involved in the work of the CCIN.

Agreed: –

1. That the notes be approved.
2. That the RSA, together with Plymouth, work with the ICA to pull together a briefing document in respect of their work and how co-operative councils might get involved or realise benefits.
3. That the RSA help facilitate a formal meeting between the Network and the International Co-operative Alliance.
4. That the RSA contact the Co-operative College on behalf of the Network and report back on issues/opportunities.

3. Notes of the Lambeth business meeting and accompanying evaluation

The notes were agreed as a correct record.

The Chair stated that the feedback on the event had been positive and that the suggestions made by members would be incorporated into future events.

Agreed – that the notes be approved.

4. Chair's Report

The Chair provided an update on Network Membership which now stands at 20: Cardiff is the latest member to join the Network and the first Welsh authority to join.

Formal confirmation was given that the RSA had been appointed as the CCIN delivery partner.

The initial feedback from the CCIN's submission to the Local Government Innovation Taskforce had been very positive. Jon Cruddas, MP, had stated that the CCIN's submission was one of the strongest submissions received.

There were a number of recent successes for the CCIN, including:

- **Oldham:** Werneth Custom Build – Following the loss of Housing Market Renewal (HMR) funding, opportunities for residents interested in custom build were promoted in the former HMR areas, including Werneth; interested residents formed Community Build Werneth Ltd (CBW), who, with professional advisers, developed plans for the Werneth site. The project will see the construction of 37 new 'custom-built' homes. The project will enable CBW to create much-needed bespoke four to six bedroom detached homes on the ex-HMR site.
- **Oldham:** WorkingXtra – Our 'WorkingXtra' allocations scheme rewards tenants who do their bit through a number of work related activities including volunteering with local groups or taking part in training and employment opportunities. Residents who are engaged in these activities are given preference when housing providers allocate tenants to the borough's new-build affordable housing stock – also helping to ensure a positive social mix of tenants in each area. Every year we normally advertise around 300-350 homes as WorkingXtra, but this year we will be advertising just over 400.

- **Plymouth:** have established a ground-breaking deal with government to deliver economic growth in the south west in exchange for the devolution of powers and funding. As a result of the City Deal local partners predict it will lead to: 9,500 permanent jobs and will provide £34m of local and national public sector investment.

Tudor Evans also reported that Plymouth had been shortlisted for Delivering Differently funding. The funding will provide consultancy support to authorities reviewing service structures and who are willing to explore and implement new service delivery models. Plymouth will keep the CCIN and EOC updated and share their experiences/learning.

- **Liverpool:** Liverpool Credit Union is offering fair pay day loans. It was agreed it would be useful to have a case study on this to allow other local authorities to speak with their Credit Unions.
- **Sandwell:** Sandwell Council had created a network of local multidisciplinary hubs to act as an “early warning system” for identifying complex families. The Chair stated that there needs to be a co-operative approach to PSR work. Paul Wheeler suggested it would be useful to produce a booklet of case studies which would show the breadth of co-operative council activity and its tangible impact.

There was a general discussion about communicating the work of co-operative councils; how best to engage with MPs and other decision-makers and the timing of that. It was felt that before this could happen in earnest there needed to be a clear and agreed definition of what constitutes a ‘co-operative council’ and a common framework to guide its operation (e.g. approaches to procurement, community involvement etc). This was a task to be undertaken by the Values and Principles Board and would inform a forward communication plan and also the preparation of a ‘toolkit’.

Reference was made to the activity plan already agreed and that all members of the Network should consider how they can support the delivery of that; including whether they could take on responsibility for communicating with any local, influential MPs.

Due to the impact of recent adverse weather conditions it was felt that the next Forum meeting in Plymouth scheduled for 28th of March be postponed and rescheduled for 20th June. The RSA will facilitate further discussions regarding national or regional Network meetings in Glasgow, the North West (potentially led by Liverpool) and Telford and Wrekin.

Agreed:

1. That the RSA contact Liverpool about a case study on their Credit Union’s fair approach to pay day loans to be shared via the website.
2. That the RSA develop a booklet case studies reflecting the work of co-operative councils – possibly to be launched at the Labour Party Conference (potentially in collaboration with the ICA).
3. That the Values and Principles board, facilitated by the RSA, complete work on defining a Co-operative Council and report to the next EOC meeting.
4. That the Plymouth Network be rescheduled to Friday, 20th of June.
5. That the RSA hold further discussions with Glasgow, Liverpool and Telford and Wrekin to plan future Forum meetings.

5. CCIN Membership

The RSA provided an update on Network Membership - Luton had decided not to go ahead with membership at the moment.

As agreed at the last meeting it was felt that efforts should be focused on liaising with authorities who might most benefit from as well as contributing to the work of the Network. It was suggested that Leeds, Doncaster, Islington, Enfield, Coventry, Lancashire and Swansea should be approached.

The Chair also stated that all authorities in Northern Ireland should be approached as the CCIN does not currently have any members from that part of the county.

Agreed:

1. That the RSA liaise with the Chair in respect of contacting the above UK authorities via a personal letter in the next two weeks.
2. That the RSA also liaise with the Chair to send a letter to all authorities in Northern Ireland, providing information on the CCIN and asking if they would consider joining. (This may be delayed until arrangements are in place for the transfer of powers to councils in Northern Ireland due to the Reform of Local Government in Northern Ireland).

6. CCIN Budget

Budget information for 2013/14 and a projected budget of £102,230 or 2014/15 (based on existing membership) was discussed. There was sufficient funding to cover all aspects of administration, Network development and communications with a small amount for events and other activity.

The RSA reiterated the need to try and increase membership as this would increase funding levels and also raised the issue of sponsorship. There were some concerns and caution urged in respect of ensuring that any sponsoring bodies or companies were appropriate and adequately reflected the values and principles of the Network.

Agreed:

1. That the budget be approved.
2. That all existing members be invoiced in March for 2014/15 membership fees.
3. That the RSA be requested to develop proposals for sponsorship for future consideration.

7. CCIN structures for UK wide operation

Further to the last meeting of the EOC, the RSA had produced a discussion paper and options in respect of the forward operation of the CCIN. This reflected some issues which had been raised by Edinburgh and Glasgow in respect of ensuring the Network adequately reflected regional issues/priorities whilst also retaining the principle of collective activity against shared values and principles.

Below is a summary of the key points and issues:

- The primary purpose of the Network is to provide a point of collaboration, sharing of knowledge and experience and seeking to inform and influence national debates. It was felt that this didn't require regional arrangements but good communication channels and strong networks.
- The Network was still in a developmental stage and didn't yet have the membership or evidence base to introduce regionalised working. It was felt this could be a distraction and impact on growing a strong foundation.
- Members of the Network needed to see real value from the offer the Network makes and it was felt this could be diluted by introducing such a radical change too quickly.
- It was acknowledged that there was a need for the Network to demonstrate 'value added' to all members and there were clearly issues, in Scotland in particular, which needed further debate. It was proposed that a meeting for this purpose be arranged as part of the Chair's visit to COSLA in February.

Agreed: That the proposals be further considered and discussions pursued with Scottish Network members.

8. Future Meetings

The next Forum meeting will be held in Plymouth on 20th June and will focus on:

- Co-operative energy solutions;
- Co-operative approaches to the economy;
- Co-operative Education;
- Co-operative solutions to pay day lending.

It was also agreed that the next Executive Oversight Committee meeting on that date.

Agreed: –

1. That the new date of 20th June for the Plymouth be noted.
2. That the next EOC also be held on that date.

9. Any other business

(a) **Website Design**

The RSA had circulated draft proposals for changes to the website design.

There were a number of comments summarised below:

- Content was as, if not more, important than design. It was essential that the website became a useful place for members (and others) to go to get update, information, advice.
- It was important for the website to be regularly updated and maintained – there were uploads still needing to be made.

- The website was one aspect of a wider communications strategy and there was a question about what that was for the Network.
- Resources should be focused on improving what is already there rather than a complete redesign. Many of the ideas in the proposals were good but it was requested that consideration be given to how these can be incorporated into the existing site.
- There was a request that members be able to upload their own content.

Agreed:

1. That all information be uploaded asap and the website actively managed and updated.
2. That the Chair be authorised to liaise directly with the RSA to agree any changes etc.
3. That the RSA be requested to prepare a forward Communications Strategy for sharing with the EOC and wider Network.
4. That the RSA consider members being able to upload to the website direct as part of any changes made.

(b) Officers' Network

There had been early discussions on the merits of establishing an informal officers' network to provide a forum for officers from CCIN authorities to collaborate, share information and best practice on live projects etc. This would offer something different to the more formal Network meetings.

The RSA and Jackie Wilson had discussed and agreed to organise a first 'virtual' working session for officers on performance indicators for a co-operative council and then further consider this issue.

Agreed: – That consideration of establishing an officers' network be discussed in more detailed following the first virtual event scheduled for March, 2014.