



# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

### CONFERENCE PART 1

16 November 2016

11.00 – 12.30 Room D City Hall, Cardiff

#### Attendees

**Councillors:** Chris Penberthy (Plymouth), Peter Bradbury (Cardiff), Barbara Brownridge (Oldham), John Fahy (Greenwich), Chris Herries (Norwich), , Tony Newman (Croydon), Chris O'Hare (Knowsley), Stephen Powers (Newcastle),

**Officers:** Laura Amey (Cardiff), Jennifer Barker (Oldham), Christine Boston (Cardiff), Alison Comley (Bristol), Fiona Gibson (Cardiff), Nicola Huckerby (CCIN), Sue Jarvis (Knowsley), Simon Parkinson (Co-operative College), Giles Perritt (Plymouth)

**Guests:** Ian Brazier (Foster Care Co-operative), Alex Cole (Tin Smart Social Ltd), Angela Colebrook (Co-operative College), Dr Mervyn Eastman (Change AGents Network UK), Rob Francis (Office for Public Management), Laurie Gregory (Foster Care Co-operative), Emma Hoddinott (Co-operative Party), Pat Juby (Co-operative Party), Cllr Tony Kennedy (Birmingham), Jim McMahon OBE MP, Tracy Millard (Gloucestershire) Kim Perkins (Foster Care Co-Operative), Cllr Matt Rodda (Reading). Steve Reed OBE MP, Dafydd Thomas (Perform Green/ Made Open), Karen Wilkie (Co-Operative Party), Robert Woolf (Made Open), Di Robinson (Bristol), Huw Williams (Newport). Gareth Wright (Co-operatives UK),

#### Apologies

**Councillors:** Phil Bale (Cardiff), Allen Brett (Rochdale), Andrew Burns (Edinburgh), Susan Elsmore (Cardiff), Richard Farnell (Rochdale).

#### Welcome

The session was chaired by Jim McMahon OBE MP, Shadow Minister for Local Government and Devolution.

Simon Parkinson CEX Co-operative College advised of a series of events that were forthcoming including the Manchester Interactive Event entitled 'Co-operative Responses to

Political Mayhem - Toad Lane to Trump', which will be streamed live over the internet on 22<sup>nd</sup> November.

## **The Co-operative Council Vision and How It Was Made 'Real' in Oldham**

Jim McMahon OBE MP

Jim McMahon addressed the conference as an advocate for co-operative principles and stated the importance of making a difference on the ground; the doing, the point of public service and politics.

He stated that there were different issues in Local Government but common elements throughout. It is important to have a positive influence on the future in different types of climate giving more power to the people that Councils represent.

The EU referendum result showed that in a negative way, now there is a need to have a positive platform i.e. co-operative ideals. This won't be easy as communities are complex and conflicting with competing issues; this is the challenge co-operative Councils face.

People do not always understand what a co-operative is, that everybody does their bit and contributes, and everybody gets something from it. Galvanising people, engaging with people, getting people involved and connecting them is the way forward.

Interesting times ahead – people want more power over their lives and devolution gives a ground to do just that.

## **Co-operative Performance Framework**

Jenni Barker, Oldham Council

Jenni Barker gave a presentation entitled 'Measuring the Co-operative Difference'. Jenni stated that as Local Authorities, there is a need to monitor, report and measure, but it can be difficult to know if you are co-operative. Work to become co-operative started two years ago in Oldham and only now are they seeing the results and being able to evidence it although not in the usual performance management way.

The methodology for measuring the co-operative difference is based on Oldham's co-operative vision – Place, People and Public Service – which is not captured by KPIs. All Councils have similar issues by being measured on service performance, finance and high-level KPIs. To work co-operatively, it is important to think about how to make things work and how to get the most added value from it, getting people on board to allow for culture change. This can be summarised as 'it ain't what you do it's the way that you do it'. The co-operative difference is based on values, behaviours, collective benefits and how people interact with each other and services.

Jenni provided the example of 'Working Xtra' in Oldham which prioritises housing for people who work, volunteer or are carers. The scheme had the following impacts:

- Place
  - Less anti-social behaviour,

- A stronger economy,
- Greater satisfaction from residents for their neighbourhoods, and
- Stable communities.
- People
  - Increased resilience,
  - Increased confidence,
  - Improved health, and
  - More employment opportunities.
- Public services
  - Strong partnerships with Housing Associations and Registered Social Landlords,
  - Increased satisfaction from residents, and
  - Reduced demand on some services; making a change to the social norm.

A second example was provided which referenced Council Tax collection. Collection rates were low. The co-operative solution is to encourage people to let the Council know if they can't pay, the Council can provide budgeting support and welfare advice, offer flexible payments including fortnightly direct debits, work with credit unions. The ripple effect was:

- Place
  - More equitable,
  - Stronger economy, and
  - Increased income for people.
- People
  - Increased financial resilience, and
  - Increased wellbeing.
- Public Services
  - Increased collection rates,
  - Reduced budget pressures, and
  - Better relationships with residents, again a change to the social norm.

What is a co-operative place? – A strong economy and opportunity for increased economic growth; thriving businesses and enterprising residents; all sectors working together for its vision for the place; high level productivity with everyone doing their bit; diverse and cohesive communities benefitting from equal opportunities.

What are co-operative people? – Skills, people being productive, confident and resilient.

What are co-operative Public Services? – Maximising social values, outcomes not output; measuring in the immediate/short/medium/long term; KPIs, case studies and qualitative measures.

Next Steps –views are needed on what comes next. Ideally 2 to 3 member Councils will pilot a methodology, establish a working group to consider feedback and provide final publication by January 2017.

## **Peer Review**

Councillor Chris Penberthy and Giles Perritt, Plymouth Council

The ambition of a co-operative Peer Review is to help support Councils to improve their ability to respond co-operatively to local priorities and issues.

Some volunteer peer reviews are already underway but more are needed.

Where are you on the co-operative journey? Do you have a co-operative vision? Can you evidence strong co-operative leadership? Can you demonstrate co-operative leadership of place and communities?

What to expect? – Flexible guidance aimed at advancing and improving your Council's co-operative journey; clear established outcomes; a focus on maximising benefits and minimising unnecessary burdens.

What does the team look like? – A lead peer reviewer, 2 other Councillors with relevant experience, 3-4 officers including an officer from an external co-operative body. Members on the peer review will now be reimbursed, as will the partners.

Negotiation would take place as to what form of review would take place, depending on what the issues are, whether they're new/old etc. There are options of 1, 2 or 3-day reviews; the 3-day review would be £4,300 & VAT and expenses. It is hoped that whilst reviews were underway, further relationships with member Councils would be built.

## **Policy Labs**

An update was provided on the three current Policy Labs.

### **1. Beyond Asset Transfer**

Councillor Stephen Powers, Newcastle City Council

The current programme started in 2013 with the long-term ambition of transferring all community assets to communities. The Newcastle Policy Lab is led by co-operative team members; it's important that the work is led by people 'at the coal face' even if this means that the work takes longer.

The programme started with a lot of assets being transferred quickly then a programme of Community Asset Transfers (CAT) was established. This process was driven by budget pressures but mainly by the want to secure the community assets.

A package of support and advice was developed – meetings with management committees, discussing costs and taking legal advice. There were 29 community buildings; 8 were done straightaway, 6 were held onto by existing leases, 5 were wound down due to the state of buildings and repair bills, 2 went to other organisations.

Progress was slower than anticipated but the challenges had not been obvious at the start. There were different barriers and issues in each building such as the reluctance to take on new leases, capacity of skills/time/volunteers, enthusiasm of people wanting to get involved

in the management of buildings and capacity of Council officers as CAT competes with officer time. It is important to build in such factors as the beginning of the process.

Examples of successful transfers were provided such as Blake Law partnership along with the specific challenges faced along the way.

The policy lab has developed a 'What works' guide for all members which it has also provided to local groups to show what can happen when people take power over their local assets.

The next steps are to promote the What Works guides and include the Blake Law partnership example; look at more learning from other places such as Sunderland and invite network colleagues to share experiences. A seminar will be held in Newcastle and members will be invited in the New Year.

Asset transfer can be hugely resource and time intensive but also has great benefits such as devolving to communities. It can unlock creativity, power and ambitions through a co-operative Council beacon, and enable people to achieve better outcomes.

## **2. Housing Commission**

Councillor Tony Newman, Leader Croydon Council

Cllr Newman spoke about winning an election on a manifesto called 'Ambition for Croydon'. He stated that the value of co-operative networks is what drives them even in times of austerity. He spoke of the recent tram disaster and seeing inspirational work from people working together with shared values.

Cllr Newman noted that co-operative values can be put on the back burner in some Councils as staff levels are decreasing and there are more pressures on resources. Gathering and learning from best practice is the way forward.

For example Community Led Housing, in Croydon it is more about home ownership whereas in Hull it is about tackling voids. Croydon has huge waiting lists and increasing demand for housing so they are looking at the land trust model; pulling together best practice, working more closely together, creating a living document – a practical tool kit, and taking the lead in finding housing solutions which involve people.

## **3. Developing a Co-Operative Theory of Change**

Jenni Barker, Oldham Council (Standing in for Dr Henry Kippin)

Jenni Barker discussed Oldham and Sunderland Co-operative Councils working to a five-year forward plan.

What progress have Co-operative Councils made in 5 years? Some progress has been made but it cannot yet be evidenced. There is a need to build on pre-conditions for a deeper public service reform. The landscape has shifted, and will do so further with Brexit/Trump among other issues.

In summary the challenges ahead are huge. The CCIN support Co-operative Councils to ensure they are fit for purpose:

- Translating the platform for change into real and meaningful changes to the service offered for citizens;
- Driving new approaches to devolution and filling the public services creativity gap;
- Offering the co-operative response to Brexit and Trump for a real and lasting connection;
- Flipping the starting point from Supply to Demand;
- Understanding the root causes and shifting the narrative from services to systems and place;
- Supporting people to get them where they want to go and enabling them to achieve their goals;
- Crafting different ways of doing that so it helps more than one and has the biggest impact;
- Moving the practice from competition to collaboration; if we care about what happens we must care about the conditions it happens in.