



# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

### CONFERENCE PLENARY

16 November 2016

15.00 – 16.15 Room D City Hall, Cardiff

#### **‘Driving global municipal co-operative policy – what’s next for our Network?’**

The session was chaired by Councillor Chris Penberthy, Plymouth City Council and Vice-Chaire of the CCIN.

Cllr Penberthy introduced the panel and invited them to speak on the plenary session topic.

#### **Steve Reed OBE MP**

This is a wide ranging question; should we consider this globally? A lot of people feel disconnected by politics, following Trump and Brexit. There is now a need to renew politics by re-connecting with people. It has to start with people and working in co-operation. It is not top-down politics. It is about empowering people and giving them the start and end point back. Family, relationships and community are the most important issues. People need to be seen as rounded individuals and not a problem to be solved. We have to engage properly with people. Power is not distributed equally in society; some cannot be heard. These people have to have a voice. There needs to be new structures in public decision making to assert their voices and opinions. The people have to be active participants. Politics is broken; people have lost their trust. Politics itself has to trust people and share the power to give people back a choice.

#### **Ian Brazier, Executive Director, The Foster Care Co-operative**

We should look at the impacts and opportunities for Co-operative Councils. We are all aware of the policies, but not aware of any direction. Co-ops and partners must be considered in Wales and has to happen more. There is an awful lot of confusion about what a co-op actually is. I have been in foster care for 17 years. It works, but we are still on our own which surprises me. We are open to short-term Government funding programmes, or we can look at 5 – 10 year social funding models. ‘Co-opt’ is not the way to go. It needs to work ‘with’ people, not be done ‘to’ the people. All Local Authorities have a vital role as they help to define who and what we are to the public. We need consolidation of some of the practices spoken about over the last two days to become a useful model for others. There’s still insufficient understanding of what a co-op really is, and this needs to be established. ‘People’, ‘Place’, and I would add ‘Participation’, are all essential components.

## **Dr Mervyn Eastman, Co-Director and Co-Founder Change AGents Network UK**

We know that social care is at a tipping point. It is all related to supply and demand, especially around older people. This is a challenge to the co-op sector which is expected to cover the gap between supply and demand. Co-ops need to ensure that people are not marginalised or patronised. Co-operation is essential. The only way to ensure we really empower users is to stop calling them 'users' and think of them as members of a co-op of their own. We also need to empower the lowest of our workforce in terms of training. The Council system is not working for me. The only way a co-op Council works in terms of social care is where the community is put in charge of governance and control.

## **Councillor Stephen Powers, Newcastle City Council**

There are opportunities for Co-op Councils. The Chancellor shows signs of loosening on George Osborne's squeeze on the budgets, but this is yet to be seen. Austerity is due to continue in some way, shape or form. New ways of working are still needed. The challenge is to link the reform initiatives to what is actually needed in communities. We have to engage with communities so as to not fail. Communities have to be able to access benefits from growth and need to be aware of the benefits if they can unlock that growth. This is a huge challenge for the CCIN. In terms of a global co-op policy, we have to be seen as international and open for business; trade, cultural relationships and best practice with overseas partners. For the future, we have to utilise best practice but extend outside of the network also. We have to sharpen engagement on policy issues. CCIN needs to help shape the national policy as the Core Cities group have.

## **Question & Comments**

Laurie Gregory, Chairman of The Foster Care Co-operative, said there seems to be two set-ups, one for Wales and one for England. If anyone was interested in speaking about the designs to help co-ops in the social sector, Laurie would be happy to talk for mutual benefit. Details would be added into a future newsletter, including beneficial contacts.

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Cllr Tony Kennedy, Assistant Leader Birmingham City Council, said the CCIN needs to be a trans-Atlantic network. He would like to see a thriving global effort, as a lot of the challenges faced are global rather than simply local, and would like the views of the CCIN on this issue.

Steve Reed OBE MP said it was a good point, and there was a policy network that uses a similar model in Barcelona, Montreal, etc. that could be looked at. We could learn from there and also then share learning across a global stage.

Simon Parkinson, Chief Executive Co-operative Collee, referred to the International Co-operative Alliance (The Alliance). In Quebec last month they had discussed the largest health co-operative in the world from Brazil. This is a massive international network that we are already part of. We need to play a full role there as well.

Ian Brazier agreed there was a lot of expertise in the CCIN and we should be engaging more actively with international organisations, especially where best practice is free of charge within the co-operative.

Dr Mervyn Eastman said that there wasn't a tradition of social care co-ops in the UK, but there is in Brazil. There is very little evidence that the end-users are in any way in control after the work done by co-ops. We have to change the relationship between the provider and the recipient. The user has to be in control of the service, but we can certainly learn lessons from around the world.

Dr Mervyn Eastman said that there is a 'Taking Care' document from the Co-operative Party which discusses that very issue.

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Di Robinson, Director of Policy & Strategy Bristol City Council, said the public have already voted for their Members as part of their democratic structure. It is an interesting challenge as the public cannot control everything, and have voted for political leaders to do so as part of their mandate.

Simon Parkinson said the only way to deliver services after austerity is to do so in partnerships with local people. It's important to give people what they need, and not necessarily what they think they want. We need to find new creative solutions to problems.

Steve Reed said it was worth talking to Councils already trying to establish such partnerships. Most Councils have a delivery model, but they are not specifically local and do not share the experiences of local people. People need that control, but need professionals to properly give a voice to those people. The Councils do work for the best interests of individuals, but there is no one model for this as needs vary from place to place.

Ian Brazier said that the commissioning process was often an issue. This is the biggest driver of costs, and often the contract detail can often be the cause of unnecessary costs.

Cllr Chris Penberthy said there may be a history of telling people what to do and not discussing with them how best to get things done. We have to learn to trust, and question how we do change the culture about how we think we solve the problems that people don't think are problems anyway.

## **Closing Remarks**

### **Cllr Chris Penberthy, Plymouth City Council and Vice Chair of the CCIN**

Cllr Penberthy thanked everyone for their participation. It is important to hear a sense of where we could be, as well as where we currently are. Some of the projects discussed have been inspiring.

Today's event will be discussed in blogs on the website. All members are welcome to submit a blog, share their thoughts or ask a question. The Network is all about sharing the thinking.

Cllr Penberthy publically thanked all those who helped to set up this series of meetings. He also thanked everyone for attending and for sharing their experiences with each other.

**Councillor Peter Bradbury, City of Cardiff Council**

Cllr Bradbury re-iterated the thanks to all officers of Cardiff Council for the work put in to set up the event, and extended his thanks to all those who had attended and accepted the hospitality of the City of Cardiff.

Devolution had been bottom-up in Wales with a referendum for the Assembly. The top-down approach in England was not one that Welsh Labour would advocate. We have to talk to communities and external bodies, etc. or there is a danger of leaving people behind without any kind of proper scrutiny.

The Welsh football team which did so well in the recent European Championships competed under the mantra of 'Together Stronger', which is a motto that could also be adopted by the CCIN. We can't dictate to communities, but have to work as partnerships. Cllr Bradbury feels that this is done in Cardiff, and that some exceptionally good work has been achieved with communities here e.g. the new Hubs in local areas.

Cllr Bradbury finished by quoting Margaret Mead who said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."