



Tackling the Key Barriers to Developing the Co-operative Economy

Meeting for Leaders and Co-operative Leads

1530 – 1700 hours, Monday 19 July 2021 - Zoom

MINUTES

Members

Councillor Sharon Taylor OBE – Leader, Stevenage Borough Council (Chair)
Councillor Joyce McCarty – Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy, Newcastle City Council
Councillor Joyce Welsh – South Tyneside Council
Councillor Louise Gittins – Leader, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Councillor Paul Stewart – Deputy Leader, Sunderland City Council
Councillor Matthew Brown – Leader, Preston City Council

Guest

Jonny Gordon-Farleigh – Stir to Action for item 2.1
James de le Vingne – Co-operatives UK

In Attendance

Nicola Huckerby – Operations and Communications, CCIN (Minutes)

Apologies

Councillor Arooj Shah – Leader, Oldham Council

Absent

Councillor Jo White – Deputy Leader, Bassetlaw District Council
Councillor Susan Brown – Leader, Oxford City Council
Councillor Swithin Long – Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Tourism and Housing, Torbay Council
Councillor Keith Cunliffe – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care | Lead for Community Wealth Building – Wigan Council

1. **Welcome and introduction to the session** – Cllr Sharon Taylor, Chair
The Group agreed to send their solidarity and best wishes to Cllr Arooj Shah.

Cllr Taylor explained that the Network had an important role to play in encouraging all Co-operative Councils to support and help grow the co-operative economy.

2. **Matters Arising from the last meeting 6 April 2021**
 - 2.1. **Pipeline Development Tool** – Jonny Gordon-Farleigh

Jonny Gordon-Farleigh reminded everyone that at the last meeting he'd presented the 'Community Anchors: A Co-operative Recovery' report that they'd prepared for Preston City Council. There was an action for 'Stir to Action' to offer Workshops to CCIN Members on the Co-operative Development Pipeline Tool which would help councils to create a framework to identify the 'entry points' for potential co-ops.

JG-F proposed that Stir to Action:

- deliver a 1.5-hour Taster Workshops to explore how pipeline could work for co-operative councils.
- offer those that were interested in taking the idea further a 5 – 10-day support package on diagnostic, strategic development, and funding opportunities
- **a copy of the presentation is circulated with the minutes.**

Cllr Sharon Taylor suggested the CCIN sponsor places on the Taster Workshops which would be offered to Members and Officers on a first come first served basis. Free places would be limited to one per council. Additional places would be paid for.

Cllr Matthew Brown supported the proposal saying that it had been very helpful having Stir to Action work with them in the community. Raising awareness of alternative models of business is really hard as people aren't used to hearing it, and this is more apparent in deprived communities where they are not used to being told about alternative ways of doing things that could benefit them. As a result of Stir's involvement, Preston has seen the beginnings of a food co-operative, the South Asian community organising a translators worker co-operative and Gig economy alternatives. Cllr Brown thought that the proposal was very exciting as it could lead to the establishment of co-ops in all our areas.

It was agreed: to offer sponsored places to Members to undertake the Taster Workshops.

Action: Nicola Huckerby to speak to Jonathan Downs to identify a budget. NH to work with JG-F to find a date and offer the opportunity to members.

Jonny Gordon-Farleigh also mentioned the sponsorship opportunities around the Stir to Action New Economy Programme which would start in September. If anyone is interested in investing in the programme for their local communities, they should contact stirtoaction@gmail.com.

2.2. **Accredited Training Programme** – Nicola Huckerby

There was an outstanding action from the last meeting where we'd asked whether there were any training needs for members or officers that should be included in the Policy Lab of Accredited Training and the Coop College is delivering for us.

In tandem to this there is also a Policy Prototype to identify the training & development needs of Associate Members and in particular Opposition members.

Cllr Louise Gittins suggested that we might create a 'Co-operative Champion' role among the officers so that they could help promote 'Our Co-operative Difference' in their council. This would be someone who had undertaken the CCIN training programmes, and who could encourage others to do the same.

It was agreed: To suggest to the Officer Network that we create 'Co-operative Champions' and any proposals for Accredited Training Programme should be submitted to NH.

Action: All.

2.3. **Regional Banking Session** – Nicola Huckerby

NH reported that Jane Hutt MS, the Minister for Social Justice in the Welsh Government, has agreed to speak at a CCIN event on Regional Mutual Banks. NH was in the process of speaking to representatives from others working in this area with a view to running a session at the Annual Conference in October.

CLr Matthew Brown suggested that we seek to engage someone from the European regional banking sector to participate in the session to help demonstrate that there is an international evidence base to show that these banks work.

It was agreed: that MB and NH liaise to find an international speaker. That the session should be called 'New Economic Thinking'.

3. **Working with Co-operatives UK** – James de le Vingne

- 3.1. In introducing the Coop Economy Report data for 2021 James de le Vingne explained that the sector was dominated by the larger retail co-ops and there was little evidence to show any movement in local economies. The largest financial contributors to developing the co-op economy are philanthropic organisations.
- 3.2. James explained that if our baseline of knowledge in and around our communities is low, if the co-op economy hasn't grown for a decade, and there is no one sector showing significant growth or opportunity, the capital resources required to change that are being hard fought over and competitive – all these factors show the magnitude of the challenge ahead. The only way to change this is to 'mainstream co-operative development' as a policy priority.
- 3.3. James highlighted some of the projects that Co-operatives UK is working on that might tackle some of the barriers to developing the co-operative economy. There is a spectrum of opportunities for councils to engage with CUK – from light touch to commissioning:

Light touch strategic advice and support.

- They've worked with the Policy Team at Sheffield City Region who were curious about what policy commitments might look like to grow the coop economy, but they were not sure where to start. They had seen the evidence based including the Coops Unleashed report. CUK provided a couple of papers on what they might consider. In their 'Renewal Action Plan' there are now several references to commitments to stimulating the coop economy. Light touch – a few hours work.
- Helped Plymouth City Council write their Co-operative Development Strategy. This work was a collaboration and drew on the national data set of CUK. This involved several days' work over a period. They are continuing to help monitor the outcomes of that.
- Relationship building with Preston City Council where over several years they have looked at gap co-ops. For the last 18 months they have been acting as an advisor to CLr Matthew Brown and the officer lead, Rachel Stringfellow, including the provision of support and training to various teams. This relationship led to the commissioning of Stir to Action by Preston. CUK play an active role in the Preston Co-operative Development Network advising the council.
- The work in 'Middleton Cooperating', Greater Manchester, which has been declared a co-operative zone by Andy Burnham. CUK was involved in the early stages to help shape some of their thinking, drawing on their experiences. Middleton Cooperating is a legal entity.

Delivering work in partnership with Local Authorities

- CUK have been working with the Greater London Authority for a year, helping community co-ops take over community assets on their high streets. The GLA has invested £170k to enable

this to happen. CUK have used their established infrastructure and links to co-op development advisors to help programme that money in three London Boroughs. Some of those groups are getting ready to issue a Share Issue to acquire those assets.

- Ownership Hub – an intensive partnership approach where CUK is employing people in city regions/local areas where there is someone dedicated to this work in a specific locality to grow the sector. The aim is to make sure that all the stakeholder groups in a local area are aware of the coop model and opportunities.

This project was recently launched in the Sheffield City Region, having had a policy commitment to promote the development of the coop economy. Other Combined Authorities have now declared an interest in funding their own roles so that they can be part of a city region network championing employee and worker ownership.

The Ownership Hub receives substantial funding by Partners and is connected to the [1 Million Owners campaign](#).

- They are now in year 4 out of 5 working with six small communities in the UK which are areas of high deprivation, delivering a piece of work with the New Economics Foundation (NEF) and Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) focussing on community economic development. This project is about empowering local communities to have a stake and say in their local economies.

3.4. James made some suggestions on where progress might be made in the short term:

- Converting existing businesses into coops
- Converting CICs (Community Interest Companies) into coops
- Look at thematic areas rather than sectors
- Think about Frameworks eg Community Economic Development, Community Wealth Building

To find out more about any of these activities and projects contact James de le Vingne: james.delevingne@uk.coop.

4. Next meeting – October

Main item: Future Procurement Strategies / Reserve Contracts

It was agreed: to include social value in this discussion.

Action: NH to send out a Doodlepoll and speak to Matthew Brown about potential speakers.

5. Any Other Business

Having had conversations with co-operators and potential members, NH offered to pull together a list of some of the tangible and practical projects and campaigns that Co-operative Council's did, which could be useful in describing what a Co-op Council is.

Action: NH to circulate to the Group before the next meeting.

Contact:

Nicola Huckerby

Operations and Communications

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