



# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2023

#### MINUTES

**0830 hours – 0945 hours on Thursday, 2 November 2023  
at Sunderland City Hall, Plater Way, Sunderland, SR1 3AA**

#### **Present**

##### Speakers:

Cllr Louise Gittins – Chair of CCIN and Leader of Cheshire West and Cheshire  
Cllr Paul Cassidy - Vice Convenor Environment and Regeneration, Inverclyde Council  
Cllr Sandra Barr - Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Cooperative Council, Stevenage Council  
Cllr Alistair Willoughby – Executive Member for Community Partnerships, North Herts Council  
Helen Chicot – Reform and Prevention Lead, Rochdale Borough Council  
Lucie Stephens and Kate Hawkins – Ideas Alliance

There were representatives from the following Member organisations present:

Anthony Collins LLP  
Billingham Town Council  
Burntwood Town Council  
Cardiff Council  
Cheshire West and Chester Council  
Constellia  
Co-operatives UK  
E3M  
Hounslow Council  
Ideas Alliance  
Inverclyde Council  
Kirklees Council  
Llanelli Town Council

Mutual Ventures  
North Herts Borough Council  
Oldham Council  
Oxford City Council  
Peopletoo  
Plinth  
Rochdale Council  
South Tyneside Council  
Stevenage Borough Council  
Sunderland City Council  
Trafford Council  
Wigan Council  
Woughton Community Council

#### **Apologies:**

Jim McMahon MP  
Steve Reed OBE MP  
Lord Kennedy  
Cllr Peter Bradbury – Cardiff Council  
Cllr Sue Smith – Rochdale Council  
Cllr Mike Stubbs – Newcastle-under-Lyme Labour Group  
Cllr Sue Woodward – Burntwood Town Council  
Cllr Nicky Brennan – Birmingham City Council  
Cllr Sarah Doyle – Liverpool City Council

#### **1. Welcome and Introduction**

Cllr Louise Gittins, chair of the Network, welcomed members to the Annual General Meeting. She highlighted the fabulous location and reflected on the excellent city tour provided by Sunderland City Council the previous day. During the tour, delegates saw how cooperatives flourished in the city and

were presented with an innovative cultural showcase at the regenerated fire station. Cllr Graeme Miller and his team were thanked for the City Welcome, which had raised the bar for future AGMs.

Cllr Gittins thanked the members of the Executive Oversight Committee and Values and Principles Board for their support and hard work over the last year.

## **2. Minutes of the Last AGM – 23 November 2022**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed to as a true and accurate record. No matters arose.

## **3. Review of the Year August 2022 – July 2023**

The Chair gave an update on achievements during the year; the highlights were:

- The number of Full Member Councils increased by almost one-third, from 34 to 45 Councils
- Four Opposition Groups in our Associate Members took control of their council in May 2023 and have transitioned into Full Council members
- The CCIN is the fastest-growing cross-sector Network in local government
- Bestowed the titles of Honorary Vice President on Jim McMahon OBE, MP and Baroness Sharon Taylor OBE
- Funded four Policy Labs & five Policy Prototypes
- Published 478 Case Studies on our website: [www.councils.coop](http://www.councils.coop)
- Organised a Study Visit to Mondragon
- Launched three Policy Lab Reports
  - Cooperation at the Grassroots – Led by Stevenage Borough Council
  - Growing an Inclusive Cooperative Economy – Led by Oxford City Council
  - Community Economic Development Plans – Led by Birmingham Council

A key achievement of the last year had been agreeing on what it meant to be a cooperative council:

### **What you can do as a council:**

- play a central role in tackling the climate emergency
- signing the 'Councils Fair Tax' Declaration
- Pay Real Living Wage as well as being part of a real living wage city/borough/town,
- signing the modern slavery charter
- actively encourage coop innovation within staff teams.

### **What you can do with CCIN:**

- encourage members and officers to undertake CCIN-certified training modules
- actively participate in the CCIN officer network,
- join the CCIN Governance,
- engaging with Policy Labs/Prototypes/
- engage with the WhatsApp groups,
- submit regular case studies,
- engage with social media channels,
- use the CCIN dynamic purchasing system to bring in extra capacity and expertise.

The Chair explained that there were two approaches for councils to grow the cooperative economy:

### **Community Wealth building:**

- Develop an Inclusive Economy Charter
- Promote a progressive procurement policy
- Support the creation of a regional mutual/community bank by investing

- Work with local anchor institutions to buy and recruit local
- Regulate rent and rates for 'local' businesses in council-owned property
- Offer business rate rebates for those businesses that become Living Wage Accredited
- Champion Local Employment schemes
- Have insourcing Council Services as an objective

#### **Cooperative placemaking:**

- Develop a cooperative development strategy
- Establish a cooperative development network
- Commit to community engagement in local decision making including participatory budgeting
- Invest in local community production, particularly those focusing on community energy to tackle the climate emergency
- Promote the circular economy
- Support local enterprises to convert into coops/worker coops
- Have an Asset Transfer policy to manage land and assets which support Community Land Trusts

#### **Policy Labs funded in 2023 were:**

Kirklees Council – Coop option training  
 Trafford Council – Tackling violence against women and girls  
 Oxford City Council – Social value toolkit for councils  
 Study Visit to Emilia Romagna

#### **Policy Prototypes funded in 2023 were:**

Greenwich Borough – Engaging and empowering residents of Woolwich Common Estate  
 Stevenage Borough – Cooperative Community Bank of Kindness  
 Inverclyde – Turning Strategic Plans into Art  
 Rochdale Borough - Cooperative Culture Making in Rochdale  
 Brent Borough – Health & wellbeing delivered by community wellbeing project

On behalf of the Network, the Chair wished everyone involved in Policy labs and prototypes good luck, adding that she looked forward to seeing the outcomes over the next year.

#### **Dynamic Purchasing System:**

The Chair reminded all members of their access to the CCIN's DPS. Key points were:

- As pre-checking has already been done, there are no financial limits on the mini-competition process
- Mini Competition must be undertaken when using the DPS, ensuring the CCIN is promoting industry best practice
- Suppliers can join at any time
- The current 5-year contract runs from 2020 – 2025

#### **4. Budget Report 2022/23**

On behalf of Oldham Council, the CCIN Accountable Body, the Chair presented the Budget Report 2023/4. Highlights were:

- The CCIN continues to see significant membership growth, with a corresponding increase in membership fees received. Total membership fees have increased by £48,853, taking the Full Council membership income to £246,992.00.
- We have also seen growth across our Associate and Affiliates, with membership fees rising to £19,700, an increase of £4,525.
- As we continue to grow as a Network, we are attending more events, which means spending more on exhibition stands, merchandise, travel, accommodation, printing, and design. However, the

return on investment is evident, especially as we continue to build the network's national profile and grow our membership.

- We continue to reinvest membership fees in our members, funding £69,800 of Policy Labs and Prototypes in 2022 / 23. These projects are at the cutting edge of cooperative development, and we are incredibly proud of what these relatively small amounts of investment deliver. As the Network continues to grow, we hope to be able to invest more funding in Policy Labs and Prototypes, encouraging more cooperative innovation.
- As the Network grows, I have asked Oldham to look at how much funding is allocated to each budget line, ensuring our budget reflects the network's growth and priorities. This refreshed budget will be brought to the next Executive Oversight Committee meeting for discussion and approval.

The Budget was approved.

## **5. Report back from Values & Principles Board**

Cllr Sandra Barr gave a verbal update on behalf of Cllr Sarah Doyle, chair of the Values & Principles Board. She began by thanking Sunderland for the welcome on what was her first to the city. She had been truly impressed by the cooperative ways of working and was keen to share many of the lessons on her return to Stevenage.

Cllr Barr reflected on the Network's Values and Principles and how these were the foundation of everything the Network did, differentiating cooperative councils from those outside the Network. Thanks were extended to all the organisations delivering the Policy Labs and Policy Prototypes. On behalf of Cllr Sarah Doyle, Cllr Barr thanked all those involved in providing her with outstanding support as chair of the Board. She was grateful to all Board members for their contributions at and between meetings. She wanted to thank Nicola Huckerby for all her hard work, dedication and wisdom throughout the year.

## **6. Our direction of travel – how to help the network thrive**

Lucie Stephens and Kate Hawkins from the Ideas Alliance reported on their work on the new CCIN Strategy. This included an in-person governance and officer session in Birmingham, one-to-one calls with specific members, and an online survey for all members. They welcomed the opportunity to speak with delegates during the conference at one of two workshops they were hosting.

## **7. Launch of the 2024 funding round**

Cllr Paul Cassidy launched the 2024 Policy Lab and Prototype project funding round. He invited all members to think about local government's challenges and the potential cooperative policy solutions that could inspire engagement and lead to meaningful change in our communities. He said there was no single challenge for which there wasn't a cooperative solution.

This year £60,000 has been allocated to fund Policy Labs and £15,000 for Policy Prototypes. Although Members can lead on one Policy Lab at any time, there was no limit to the number of projects they engaged in.

The closing date for submissions was 5 February 2024.

## **8. Policy Lab Launches 2023**

There were two Policy Reports to be launched at this year's Conference.

### **8.1 Arts & Culture for Social Cohesion**

**Presented by Cllr Alistair Willoughby – Exec Member for Community & Partnerships - North Herts Council**

Several Councils had been involved in the development of this Policy Lab, which aimed to:

- Raise the profile of arts and culture events and activities locally.
- Widen engagement with arts and culture offerings by developing an understanding of how to reach a broader range of the community.
- Understand what other kinds of arts and culture events/activities we could be offering.
- Understand what groups and voices could be better represented within arts and culture activities (for example, this could include more LGBTQ exhibitions or history events related to a particular culture)

This project demonstrates how to collaborate with partners and other CCIN members to establish cooperative working, both within and across local areas. The councils involved were Cardiff Council, North Herts District Council, Oldham Council, and Stevenage Borough Council.

It showcases how creatives are encouraged to collaborate via arts and culture networks and demonstrates how neighbouring authorities can collaborate on arts and culture offerings. The project will also identify how to drive change by understanding how we can reach a broader section of the community to engage in our arts and culture offerings and ensure they are represented in the events and activities. In doing so, this improves outcomes, including social cohesion, social and civic participation, life satisfaction and health, and the local economy.

## **8.2 This is not a manual on Coproduction**

### **Presented by Helen Chicot – Reform and Prevention Lead – Rochdale Council**

This project was an extension of a Policy Prototype previously undertaken in Rochdale Borough, which developed a community engagement toolkit. A group of CCIN councils, affiliates and citizens from the various places, got together to share their practice and experience around Co-production. Through workshops and enquiries, they developed an encyclopedia of ideas about how local government is and can engage communities in local democracy. The product is a reflection and a set of tools to help those who want to think and act co-operatively when making things happen together.

The group used the CCIN approach, which challenges cooperative councils to put their cooperative principles into practice to demonstrate the “cooperative difference” in their work. The CCIN [values and principles](#) have been the filter through which this project was run to enable the group to think about and share approaches to participation, coproduction and democracy that have helped support the work of cooperative councils, the communities they have worked with, and the CCIN affiliates who participated in this policy lab.

The members involved were Anthony Collins Solicitors, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Kirklees Council, Oldham Council, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, South Tyneside Council, Sunderland City Council, Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, Trafford Council, Trueman Change, Unlimited Potential, and Wigan Council.

A Dedication and thank you were extended to one of the project participants, who was currently in a hospice receiving end-of-life care.

## **9. Any Other Business**

There was none.

Cllr Gittins closed the meeting at 0935 hours.