



# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

### EXECUTIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

#### Online – Zoom meeting

**Meeting 1100 – 1300 Monday, 25 November 2024**

### MINUTES

#### **Present:**

Cllr Jim Robbins	Swindon Borough Council (Chair)
Cllr Ernest Gibson	South Tyneside Council (Vice Chair)
Cllr Sandra Barr	Stevenage Borough Council
Cllr Peter Bradbury	Cardiff Council
Cllr Shanika Mahendran	Milton Keynes City Council– from item 5.3
Cllr Paul Cassidy	Inverclyde Council
Cllr Mike Stubbs	Newcastle-Under-Lyme Labour Group
Cllr John Fahy	Greenwich Coop Development Agency

#### **In Attendance:**

Jonathan Downs	Oldham Council (Accountable Body)
Nicola Huckerby	CCIN (Minutes)
Fiona Gibson	Cardiff Council
Ash Crane-Bell	South Tyneside Council
Ben Greenwood	Rochdale Council

#### **Apologies:**

Cllr Kelly Middleton	Telford & Wrekin Council
Cllr Sue Smith	Rochdale Borough Council
Cllr Barbara Brownridge	Oldham Council (Accountable Body)
Cllr Mili Patel	Brent Council (Chair of V&P)

#### **1. Welcome, introductions and apologies**

- 1.1.** The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, the first for the new EOC. He said it felt like a pivotal moment for the Network, given the Government's commitment to doubling the size of the cooperative sector and the network's founders' all holding ministerial positions. He explained that there was a massive opportunity to build on the fantastic work already done is an enormous opportunity.

The Chair reported that since the last meeting, exhibition stands at the Liberal Democratic and Labour Party Annual Conferences have been successful. The Coop Development Toolkit was pre-launched at the Coop Party's Cooperative Change Event, and we successfully launched the Toolkit and AI Policy Labs at the LGA Conference. The new Members' Pack and the Review of the Year were distributed at the Labour Party and LGA Conferences. In addition, two new 'Why Join' videos were published on the website.

- 1.2.** All members introduced themselves, and new members were welcomed.

1.3. Apologies were noted.

## 2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 23 July 2024

These were agreed upon as a correct record.

## 3. Matters Arising from the meeting on 23 July

### 3.1. Officer session on using the DPS and DPS Renewal

Jonathan Downs reported that Oldham Council had had an interim head of procurement for some time, but they have now appointed a new Head of Procurement. The CCIN DPS is now on their radar as it is due to expire at the end of March 2025. A decision needed to be taken on whether it is possible to extend the DPS or whether we need to undertake a brand new DPS. If we need to undertake a new DPS that work needs to start at the beginning of January. J Downs informed EOC that he was meeting his Head of Procurement on 28 November and agreed to circulate a note with a recommendation on next steps after that meeting.

**Action:** Jonathan Downs.

As there has been a significant change in the number of councils in the Network, a session for Officers was overdue but would be organised for Spring 2025.

**Action:** Jonathan Downs and Nicola Huckerby.

### 3.2 Legal Constitution Options for the Network

Cllr Mike Stubbs reported that he intended to make a formal proposal at the next AGM regarding the legal constitution of the Network. Unfortunately, the sub-group has not met since the last EOC meeting.

Cllr Stubbs summarised the proposal as seeking to change the legal status of the organisation (CCIN) as this had not been reviewed since the organisation was formed in 2012. It was still operating under a constitution relevant to the organisation when there were a handful of members and there were now more than 140 councils and organisations involved.

**Action:** Cllr Mike Stubbs agreed to organise a meeting with the sub-group as a priority. The views of larger councils (those paying up to £7,900 pa) would be involved in this process along with officers from the Officer Network and monitoring officers.

## 4. New Governance induction

The Chair asked whether any members had questions after viewing the New Governance Induction presentation. There were none. Jonathan Downs suggested clipping a few shorter clips from the video for others to use.

**Action:** J Downs to identify the pieces he thought were most relevant for NH to action.

## 5. Finance and Budget Update

### 5.1. Finance General Purposes Group elections

J Downs explained that the F&GPG was a relatively new group introduced to support Oldham Council as the accountable body. The Group's purpose was to provide additional assurance to EOC concerning network finances. It comprised six members from across the Network and would normally meet ahead of the EOC meeting.

The Chair asked if any members of the EOC would like to sit on the Sub-Group. The following members volunteered: Cllrs Mike Stubbs, Cllr Paul Cassidy, Cllr Ernest Gibson and Cllr Sandra Barr. As Vice Chair of EOC Cllr Ernest Gibson agreed to chair the Sub-Group.

**Action:** NH to confirm nominations from the V&P Board and report to J Downs.

**Agreed:** J Downs to arrange the first meeting of the F&GPG.

**Action:** NH to update the F&GPG WhatsApp Group and Terms of Reference with the new Members.

### 5.2 Budget Update

J Downs gave an overview of the budget. The CCIN's financial year runs until 31 July. Many areas of the 2023/4 expenditures were lower than in 2022/3. The current budget position is very healthy, but

it only takes a couple of big councils to decide to leave. Income was projected to be slightly lower in 2024/5 as Newcastle, Darlington, and Swansea have given notice to withdraw from membership.

The CCIN continues to operate with a significant financial surplus, which provides a financial buffer. It was noted that this could be reinvested in additional Policy Labs and Prototypes.

**Action from July 2024 EOC meeting:** The subgroup working on the legal constitution should undertake a SWOT analysis to consider the potential impact of becoming a cooperative society on the Budget.

### 5.3 Membership Fees Received/Outstanding

J Downs introduced the report explaining that initial efforts had been directed at getting Full Member Councils to provide PO numbers so that their membership fees could be invoiced. All other invoices would be issued before Christmas.

NH explained that we had an existing policy where if a member contacts the EOC or the CCIN's Operations Lead, advising of financial hardship, the following guidance should be followed:

- **Asking to withdraw from the Network:** if a Full Council Member wishes to withdraw from the CCIN due to financial issues, the CCIN's Operations Lead has the delegated authority to automatically offer a 25% membership fee discount.
- **Asking to withdraw from the Network following the offer of a 25% discount:** if a Full Council Member still wishes to withdraw from the CCIN following the offer of a 25% membership fee discount, the Operations Lead should escalate the issue to the EOC. The EOC will have the authority to offer a further 25% membership fee discount, taking the total discount to 50%. This option should only be used when the Full Council Member is facing clear financial challenges.
- **Asking to withdraw from the Network due to being placed in *special measures*:** if a Full Council Member is placed in special measures, the EOC have the authority to waive the membership fees for as long as the Full Council Member remains in special measures. This reflects the fact that any unnecessary spending, including membership fees, is not allowed if a Full Council Member finds itself in special measures. Members in this position are not allowed to bid for or benefit from Policy Lab funding.

**Action:** NH to circulate the 'Exceptional Financial Issues policy' and the 'Travel Policy' to all Members of EOC.

Cllr Gibson suggested that we look at instalment payments for councils that were finding it difficult to pay membership fees.

*Cllr Shanika Mahendran arrived.*

Cllr John Fahy asked whether Oldham Council was comfortable managing a growing Network's finances. J Downs felt that the invoicing processes had been streamlined over recent years, and now that he was personally managing the requests for Purchase Orders and invoicing, the process was a lot more robust. He stated that this would need to be revisited if we were to start amending the process or offering multiple instalment payments.

Cllr Mike Stubbs that the Legal Constitution Working Group would revisit the invoicing procedure.

The Chair thanked Oldham Council for managing the Network's finances.

## 6. Feedback from the V&P meeting on 12 September

In Cllr Mili Patel's absence, Cllr Mike Stubbs gave feedback on the first meeting of the V&P Board. This included:

- agreeing draft brand guidelines for the CCIN
- accepting a proposal from Coop News for CCIN to become a Federal Member of Coop Press  
**Action:** NH to chase Coop News for final costs which would include sending hard copies of the monthly magazine to all Full Members and members of the Governance, plus access to thenews.coop for all CCIN members.
- it was noted that six funded projects had failed to submit updates for the last V&P meeting, contrary to the funding agreement. To try and overcome this issue it had been agreed that V&P members would volunteer to act as sponsors for each of the live projects, working with the projects to ensure that they were reporting in a timely manner.
- Final reports had been received for two Policy Labs: Cooperative Values Driven AI (led by Wigan) and Coop Development Toolkit (Kirklees)

## 7. Strategy, Objectives and Key Results Update

- 7.1. The Chair explained that EOC is responsible for the Strategy and the Budget. Members were asked whether there were any areas of the Strategy they would like to lead on or take responsibility for.
- 7.2. Cllr John Fahy asked:
- Was the current strategy relevant to support the government's commitment to doubling the size of the cooperative sector?
  - As the CCIN has grown significantly over recent years, is it time to ensure that the staffing structure is fit for purpose?
  - Should we be putting more resources into encouraging more London Boroughs to join and for the CCIN to have a closer relationship with the Mayor of London?
  - CCIN's relationship with the Coop Party and whether we could support each other to grow together.
- 7.3. Cllr Mike Stubbs responded that the organisation's structure should be reviewed as soon as the legal structure has been settled.
- 7.4. The Chair agreed with the comments and said it was for the CCIN to decide how to support the government in its ambitions to grow the cooperative sector by working with the 'friends of the Network' based around the Cabinet table. He also agreed to use his links with the Coop Party to ensure we worked as closely as possible.
- 7.5. NH took members through the Strategy document to ensure everyone was familiar with its contents and where we needed members to lead on actions.
- 7.6. Cllr Gibson suggested offering bit size webinars at lunch-time for members to participate in
- 7.7. **Action:** All Members were asked to identify which actions they would like to lead or take responsibility for.

## 8. The Mutuels and Cooperatives Council

- 8.1. The Chair provided some background on the new Mutuels and Cooperative Council, recently established by the government. Chaired by Jonathan Reynolds, MP, Secretary of State for Business and Trade, participants included the Nationwide Building Society, Royal London, Coop Group, Coops UK, the Association of British Credit Unions, and the Building Societies Association.
- 8.2. **Action:** The Chair offered to write to the Secretary of State offering our help and support.

## 9. Policy Labs and Prototypes 2024

- 9.1. Cooperative Community Bank of Kindness – Stevenage Borough Council led this Policy Prototype project.  
**Agreed:** to approve the final report.

## 9.2. Brand Guidelines for Reports

NH introduced the draft set of Brand guidelines for approval. They were created with the support of the V&P Board, which was keen for the CCIN to have a guide for use by organisations involved in writing reports for funded policy projects. The guidelines included a template for Policy Lab reports. The Draft Guidelines have been circulated for approval.

NH explained that the guidelines included tweaking the CCIN logo by dropping the hyphen in 'Cooperative' and adding the apostrophe after 'Councils'.

**Agreed:** to update the CCIN logo to say: Cooperative Councils' Innovation Network.

The new guidelines include a logo, colour palette, font, slogan, and icons from the CCIN Statement of Values and Principles. They also include recommended design templates and text that must be included in Policy Lab reports.

## 9.3 Timetable for the launch of Policy Lab funding

NH outlined the timetable for Policy Lab funding.

**Agreed:** Key dates are:

6 December - announce the timetable in the Newsletter

20 Jan – V&P Board to discuss report on process/reviewing/outputs and engagement which can be included in the contracts for the new projects

13 Feb – Launch at the Annual Conference

13 March – closing date for Bids

19 or 20 March - joint meeting of EOC/V&P to decide which Bids to support

28 April – contracts awarded

**Agreed:** Councils would be encouraged to submit bids in any service area.

**Agreed:** The Budget available for Policy Labs would be £60k, with £15k available for Policy Prototypes.

## 10. Membership Update

### 10.1. Membership Report

NH gave an update on the latest Membership numbers:

- Full Members – 48
- Associate Members – 24
- Affiliate Members – 50
- Supporters – 20

### 10.2

The 48 Full Council Members and 14 Town, Parish and Community Councils represent 12.4m citizens and control a £20.4 billion budget.

### 10.3

Since the last meeting, the following full Members have indicated that they wish to leave the Network:

- Newcastle City Council – The Chair has written to the new Leader asking her to reconsider.
- Salford City Council – it was agreed we would reconnect once their new CEO is in place.
- Stroud District Council – keen to rejoin when they can contribute effectively.
- Swansea Council – Cllr Peter Bradbury reported that he had spoken to several colleagues at Swansea Council who had confirmed that they could no longer afford to be members of Network. It was agreed to offer them a 25% discount to retain their membership.

### 10.4

Since the last meeting, there has been one new Full Member Council, three Associate Members, and three Affiliate Members.

**Agreed:** to welcome Canterbury City Council as a new Full Council

**Agreed:** to welcome Hereford City Council, Shrewsbury Town Council, and Lichfield Labour Group as new Associate Members

**Agreed:** to welcome Social Value Engine, The #BeKind Community Benefit Society (T/A the Stoke Model) and Real World Group Social adVentures as new Affiliate Members

## 11. Event Planning update

### 11.1

NH ran through the process for supporting events and the Event Calendar for 2025.

**Agreed:** in-person and online event schedule for 2025.

The Chair asked that EOC's thanks be recorded for Nicola Huckerby's efforts in delivering the 2024 Event Calendar.

Cllr John Fahy asked whether the CCIN could write to the Mayor of London asking him to host an event at City Hall as part of the UN International Year of Cooperatives.

**Action:** The Chair agreed to write to Mayor Khan (copy in Cllr Len Duvall OBE - Greenwich), about the hosting a reception to coincide with the CCIN Annual Conference on 12 and 13 February.

**Agreed:** NH to seek Officer Support to volunteer at the 2025 LGA Conference in Liverpool (1 – 3 July).

**To Note:** Westminster City Council is keen to host the 2025/6 CCIN AGM and Annual Conference.

## **11.2 AGM and Annual Conference**

NH gave an overview of plans for the Annual Conference and AGM, which the Royal Borough of Greenwich will host on February 12 and 13. The first day will see the launch of the Greenwich Cooperative Commission, followed by a Welcome social event in the evening. The second day will begin with the AGM, followed by a full-day Conference. Over the two days, there will be three plenary sessions, a selection of workshops, and keynote speakers.

**Action:** NH to circulate the draft Agenda for the AGM, which should include an item on changing the legal constitution of the network.

**Agreed:** To put a call-out for Workshops that support the Government Missions.

Cllr Gibson shared that South Tyneside would like to run a Workshop on how they are using water from the Tyne to heat council-owned buildings.

**Action:** Cllr Gibson / Ash Crane-Bell to submit a Bid to run a Workshop.

**Agreed:** NH to approach Steve Reed OBE MP, Jim McMahon OBE, MP and Jonathan Reynolds MP to be part of the conference. Cllr Mike Stubbs offered to approach Gareth Snell MP if required.

## **12. Schedule of future meetings:**

**12.1.** The Chair urged all members to respond to the poll to set the meeting date for January.

**12.2.** The Chair reported that the Joint meeting of EOC and V&P to consider the Policy Lab Bids would be held on either 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> March. He asked all members to respond to the WhatsApp Poll as soon as it was published.

## **13. Any Other Urgent Business**

**13.1.** The Chair reported that work on the 2025 edition of the Case Studies pack will begin in January. He asked that all members to encourage their own organisations to submit Case Studies.

**13.2.** The Chair reminded members that the CCIN had a WhatsApp group for leaders, mayors, and champions, and if anyone wanted to be added to the Group, they should let NH know.

**13.3.** Cllr Sandra Barr reported that the Coop Group had increased the funding available for local causes.

The meeting finished at 1300 hours.

03.01.25 - NH