

the scottish
co-operative party

Social Justice

Agenda 2011

Consultation Paper

Social Justice sums up in two words what the Co-operative party wants to achieve across all its policies. At the heart of Social Justice is equality, that most fundamental of Co-operative values. And at the heart of Scotland's current inequalities – in health, education, housing, life expectancy – is poverty.

The Co-operative Party does not pretend that it can eradicate poverty and bring about Social Justice overnight. It does, however, have several practical solutions to coping with, and reducing existing inequalities, and towards building a society in which they do not exist in the future.

Credit Unions have been a transformational force in the lives of their members and the communities in which they are based. They have gone from strength to strength, enabling people to save, and to borrow, to learn how to budget effectively, even offering mortgages. We believe that the success of the Credit Unions needs to be built on, by increasing their scope, removing the barriers to their success – such as their vulnerability to Trust Deed schemes and bankruptcy – and encouraging other institutions such as the Post Office, Building Societies, and the Co-operative Bank to build positive links with them.

The providers of gas and electricity should also be encouraged to accept membership of a Credit Union as evidence of financial reliability enabling customers to pay for their services retrospectively instead of at a premium in advance.

In many prosperous rural areas, communities have been able to buy gas, oil, and electricity at a discount by buying it in bulk. Energy purchasing Co-operatives are a viable option for all kinds of communities everywhere. A model for initiating and sustaining this kind of purchasing Co-operative should be widely disseminated, and support offered to communities to make it happen.

Services in areas such as Domestic Abuse, Rape, Disability and Welfare Advice are now largely provided by the Third Sector. Many of the organisations providing these services began as voluntary organisations, with volunteers who were locally based giving their time and skill for no money. Now, Third Sector organisations have turnovers running to millions, highly professional trained staff, headquarters policy staff, and regular contact with senior officials and elected members. However, their governance structures as Companies Limited by Guarantee, or in some cases, Charitable trusts, make it difficult for them to have boards which represent the people they serve. We believe that as Co-operatives they would be more representative of and accountable to the communities they serve, more effective in delivering their services, and better able to withstand fluctuations in their budgets caused by government policy.

Our policies on Health, Education, Arts and Culture, and Sport, are covered elsewhere, but are cross-cut with Social Inclusion.

A few questions for consideration

What sort of barriers are there to Third Sector organisations becoming Co-operatives?

Are there any services which might be better delivered by an Employee Co-operative than by a Consumer Co-operative?

What sorts of goods services could be bought in by communities setting themselves up as Co-ops for the purpose? Broadband? Satellite TV? Ground source heat? Bio-digesters?

Are there Co-operative uses to which land formerly maintained by local authorities could be put after housing stock transfer?

What sort of partnerships could Credit Unions engage in without further legislation?

What sort of collaborative ventures could Credit Unions undertake with legislation?

Making Submissions

The Scottish Policy Committee is extremely keen to ensure that all views expressed at branches should be included in written submissions to the Scottish Policy Forum. We would ask branches to invite the Scottish Policy Committee to the meeting which considers this paper so that views can be recorded.

Submissions should be made by **19 February 2010** at the latest to Mary Lockhart, Secretary, Scottish Policy Committee, at m.lockhart@party.coop.