

the scottish  
co-operative party

*Sport*

**Agenda 2011**

**Consultation Paper**

The early sports clubs and associations were co-operative societies in all but name. They had wider social objectives than sporting excellence. They were established in communities where individuals could not afford to pay for the facilities and equipment needed for tennis, or cricket, or croquet or athletics, but instead played football on a field in sight of the pithead, or a piece of derelict ground in the shadow of a shipyard crane. Sometimes teams consisted of more than thirty people, and the goalposts were jackets. Rugby emerged from the English public school tradition, but was nevertheless as much about building networks and supporting the community – in the form of the Old School – as it was about the game itself.

Today, most of our senior league clubs are owned by multi-millionaires and oligarchs for whom they are often a symbol of prestige and a fashion accessory. With this clash between tradition and latter day reality, it is not surprising that most fans support the concept of supporter ownership, and that Supporters Direct, with its co-operative model, has generated widespread enthusiasm.

However, given the colossal sums involved in senior club ownership, and acknowledging that in Spain, Barcelona FC is wholly owned by its supporters, it is unlikely that Supporters Direct can do more than ensure that fans are represented on the boards of their clubs. The real potential for Co-operative development in sport lies where it always does – at the heart of communities, with smaller, more localised teams, and in the junior and amateur games.

More than that, the Co-operative model may well provide the only viable way in which many small clubs can continue in the long term. In the lower leagues of football, and in sports like netball, hockey, ice hockey and cricket, there is no profit to be made in the game and it is simply down to the tradition and love of the club that many teams survive.

In terms of youth and amateur teams there is also scope for development. Most are run by volunteers. Many rent substandard facilities from the local authority, and hence do not have the ability to grow and develop in the way they could and should. But there are already projects where a Co-operative governance model might be applied with minimum change. For example, Inch Park in South Edinburgh, where Lismore RFC has pioneered the concept of community ownership of facilities, shared amongst a number of different sports clubs.

This transfer of assets (and responsibility) from local authorities to the community is the way forward, and also lends itself perfectly to a Co-op model. Elsewhere, we have discussed the transfer by Local Authorities of leisure provision to not-for-profit trusts. Transferring sporting facilities already rented by local sports organisations to these organisations in order for them to own and manage them co-operatively might well be a strategy which could be usefully pursued by the Co-operative Party's network of Labour/Co-operative Councillors.

In terms of developing the co-operative business model too, there are many opportunities in the area of Sport, such as catering, availability for functions, team building activities for local businesses – indeed, the same range of activities which have delivered profit to private enterprise in Sport could contribute to Co-operation and community development.

### **A few questions for consideration**

How can the Co-operative Party in Scotland influence councils to bring forward co-operative solutions to problems faced by local sports organisations?

Are there ways in which the scope of Supporters Direct could be widened?

Are there co-operative developments ancillary to sport which could be encouraged?

Through the Community Dividend scheme, the Co-operative group supports many small sporting organisations in Scotland, is there any way in which funds like this could be applied to help develop co-operative businesses at local level and linked to sport?

How could a focused co-operative strategy for sport be developed and advanced?

### **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](mailto:m.lockhart@party.coop).