

the scottish  
co-operative party

*Supporting Public Services*  
*Co-operative Solutions*

**Agenda 2011**

**Final Paper**

## **1 Public Services**

Most people who have lived in the United Kingdom during post Second World War era automatically think of state provision when they think of public services. Consequently, when they think of public services being removed from state provision they think of privatisation probably with the involvement of multi-national capital. However, for those who lived in Britain from the period of the Industrial Revolution until the Second World war, and for million of people across the world who have lived since the war and up to the present day, the provision of services is not exclusively a matter for the state; it is a matter for the public.

For people not living within our narrow cultural constraints, delivery of services is provided through co-operatives and mutuals. The democratic nature of co-operative structures gives people direct power over service delivery. The state, whether central or local, acts as a guarantor of peoples' rights to services. The state must always be prepared to act as an enabler but should only be a provider in the last resort. Clearly this kind of co-operative vision is extremely far removed from the actual reality of 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland which makes it difficult to engage in meaningful discussions with others in the Labour Movement. However, given our knowledge of this better way, we must continue to engage, not from any sense of ideological superiority, but because we know that this better way is more economically efficient and will provide better service delivery which meets people needs better than current provision.

It is worth acknowledging that there is some co-operative provision in Scotland, for example there are a number of housing co-ops. It is equally worth acknowledging that there is a wider Third Sector which contains various social enterprises, charities and housing associations. Some of these are in a grant funded arrangement with the state while others take a more trading approach to procurement.

Many in the Labour Movement are calling for the democratisation of public services. We are unaware of any way other way to democratise a public service other than by using the co-operative model. We believe that if public services are to be delivered democratically, then the only democratic partner for democratic government is a co-operative partner.

Co-operative solutions, particularly when they are worker-led, require the support of trade unions. It is important to get the message across that co-operation is not privatisation. Since trade unions are there to protect their members, perhaps co-operation should be promoted as a structure which can help protect their members. There is a need to make co-operative working the preferred option for workers in the service sector. There is also a need to define what is meant by public.

## **2 Consumer Issues**

The British Co-operative Movement is primarily a consumer movement. We are aware that much of the raw consumerism of the past 15 to 20 years has been largely irresponsible and has created a society which has encouraged

unsustainable demand. However it is as responsible consumers that we can all unite to make demands for change in the delivery of public and private services.

As responsible citizens we recognise that service providers have a duty to provide services to all citizens and that people working in the public services have rights as well. On the other hand, we support the right to challenge the view that the provider knows best.

**North Tayside Co-op Party Branch**

Greater dialogue and greater understanding is needed between citizens and service providers

Given the overwhelming involvement of the State in provision of public services, it may be useful to develop the concept of the responsible Consumer Citizen. This would allow people to make coherent and reasonable social demands across the whole range of services while calling for a more democratic approach to service delivery – in effect, to argue for co-operative solutions.

**3 Local Government**

Local government has played a leading role in Scotland’s communities for over a century and continues to have a key role to play. Support for co-operative values is not new to local government. Regional councils in particular funded and supported co-operative development. Scotland’s local authorities have an important role to play alongside CDS supporting co-operative businesses working in partnership with co-operative and mutual enterprises. Highland Homecare is a service delivered on the council’s behalf entirely by a worker co-op.

**Ayrshire Co-op Party Branch**

Local Authorities need to be partners in developing mutual solutions with communities.

Scotland’s local authorities should work in partnership with co-operative enterprises to improve social services, develop anti-poverty strategies and to provide environmental justice for communities. Procurement policies designed to achieve social aims and maximise the benefits for local communities will always assist successful co-operative enterprises. We should challenge the fear culture and encourage best practice. Procurement legislation needs to be looked at and all local services should be considered for co-op options.

Moving to a co-operative model of service delivery would require a complete review of departmental structures within the local authorities existing political framework. We need to put in place now the support mechanism to underpin co-operative service development.

There is widespread acknowledgement that the way local authorities deliver public services is changing. Privatisation is happening but co-operative solutions can put people in ownership and control and enhance democracy. We should be pro-active in looking for services which are due to be externalised and have a co-operative model ready to promote. Public services should be delivered according to need and any profit should be paid back into the community.

We need to develop across local government, through education, a knowledge base of councillors and policy makers across all parties together with officers with expertise ready to champion the co-op model.

Food co-ops and credit unions should be widely promoted in deprived communities.

#### **4 Planning**

Planning is an issue that cuts across policy areas. We should see this as an opportunity to develop a co-operative approach to some of the greatest challenges in 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland. Planning, above all else, is about co-ordination of provision and co-operative models, particularly secondary co-operative models, provide an ideal solution in this context.

There are clear opportunities to develop co-op models to meet the needs of society to co-ordinate its approach to service delivery. For example, an industrial and provident society model could be used to create separate legal entities which would be responsible for linking up the shared responsibilities of the Health Service and local government and be democratically accountable to the communities they serve. This means extending co-operation beyond co-operation with a small “c” to creating structures which are fully accountable. It is important that co-operators take an active involvement in local planning and use it to engage with community groups.

As a Movement which is heavily involved in retail and property, we are well placed to provide socially responsible solutions to the problem of town centre development in Scotland. The co-operative model would provide an ideal structure for town centre partnerships. Not just co-operation with a small “c” between those involved in supporting town centre development but actual business models which could be used to develop town centres in a way that communities would want.

We should seek to establish a consensus that co-operation is the default position.

When planning new developments it is important to include play areas, GPs, community shops and centres where appropriate.

Co-ops should seek to take advantage of community benefit clauses. The community benefit aspect should be seen as a way to develop new co-op businesses. Opportunities may arise from the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014.

## 5 Health

As co-operators, we view healthcare much in the same way we see every issue that confronts people, their families and communities – we believe that power should lie with the people. Communities have to take responsibility for health provision and we believe co-operative and mutual models of healthcare provide them with the best opportunity to do this.

The highly emotive campaigns which have arisen from proposals to re-design the delivery of acute and specialist services underlines the importance placed on the NHS by communities and the sensitivity with which politicians need to deal with the issue of health. The co-operative model could be applied to hospitals.

### **Glasgow Co-op Party Branch**

With the aging population, social care was highlighted is the type of service where the caring, sharing Co-op model should be an obvious option.

We believe that co-operative models would produce greater integration and would suggest that the evidence of co-operative healthcare provision overseas supports this contention. A key challenge for the provision of health services is to connect them with people – the users, employees, patients and the wider community. It is essential to engender a type of ownership that enables stakeholders to feel that these services are run on their behalf and not for someone else's vested interests.

We must address the issue of elections to Health Boards which would create an element of community involvement and accountability in health delivery.

Consideration should be given to the increasingly challenging subject of care provision in Scotland. This is an area which requires partnership between the NHS and local government. It is also an area which may have significant potential for co-operative development and is an area being prioritised by Co-operative Development Scotland.

We require action on pharmacy delivery and occupational health looking at co-operative rather than private solutions.

## 6 Education

This paper is about public services and therefore more concerned about the delivery of education as a service rather than curricular issues. However, it is worth saying that the issues of educational structures and curriculum are connected. The Co-operative Movement has an excellent record in education. Many in our Movement have been able to develop intellectually and vocationally through their involvement with the Co-operative College. When, in the past, co-operatives have delivered education, delivery and content have supported each

other. We would hope that development in England regarding co-operative trust schools will lead to a return to this link.

The work being done at present in Scotland by the Co-operative Education Trust Scotland is to be highly commended and we hope this project will achieve its objective of bringing co-operative ideas to every school in Scotland. However, there is a long way to go. Co-operation offers solutions to many of the challenges of public service provision but co-operative solutions have been ignored because civil servants and politicians have no background knowledge in co-operation. Scottish higher education, almost without exception, completely ignores co-ops business models. Most teachers are still unaware of co-ops and therefore the ignorance perpetuates itself.

We recognise that Scottish education sits quite firmly within local government and that most people in Scotland would wish it to remain so. However, we would argue that in the longer term it is not just the curriculum which should become co-operative but also the structures. We need to continue to discuss how we can further develop co-operative education in schools and to develop the ownership of the curriculum so that it is owned and managed by the communities it serves.

We should collate and build on best practice already in schools, such as the Young Co-operators Network and the work of credit unions, such as Scotwest, bringing new savings models into schools.

It is essential to promote the co-operative model at school level and equally important to engage with the curricular drivers in Scotland such as Learning and Teaching Scotland.

There are a whole range of issues that require consideration within education including nursery provision, summer schools, after school clubs and breakfast clubs.