

## Annual Conference 2013

### Culture, Media & Sport Policy Paper



**Cultural and sporting bodies play a powerful role in the life of the nation and often receive large subsidies. More needs to be done to ensure that they put the needs and interests of their fans and enthusiasts first. Giving ordinary people a say over the way that these organisations are run is the best way to ensure that this occurs.**

## SPORT

Sports clubs are often regarded as community assets, yet too often they are owned by private individuals who seek to promote their own interests, or controlled by well meaning, but distant, committees.

The Co-operative Party believes that sport should be accessible to all and that it should be controlled in the interests of those who participate in its enjoyment. We can take action to help bring this about.

More needs to be done to ensure that participation in sport is accessible to all. The role of local sports clubs, many of which are run as co-operatives, is crucial in encouraging the development of team sport that brings many to lead healthier, more active lives. Yet too often there is competition between different sporting clubs for the same resources. The Government should explore the establishment of local sporting co-operatives, which would enable clubs in an area to come together with a joint agenda for encouraging participation.

### Spectator sports

Co-operative models in our top level sports are not new. The Rugby Football Union is itself a registered Industrial & Provident Society, as are most of the top cricket clubs, such as Surrey and Yorkshire County Cricket Clubs.

Football too used to be for the fans. But a social, cultural and sporting activity has become big business and clubs have become PLCs. Alongside increasing commercialisation and a growing divide between the top flight and lower divisions, Premier League clubs in England have seen a gentrification of the fan base, amounting to a form of social exclusion. Ticket price increases have priced many traditional fans – and young fans – out of the game.

The 1999 Co-operative Party publication *New Mutualism: A Golden Goal? Uniting supporters and their clubs* by Jonathan Michie considered what could be done to increase the involvement of supporters in clubs. The Co-operative Party and the last Labour Government were instrumental in the creation of Supporters Direct and the supporters' trust model.

Through the pooling of individually held shares in supporters' trusts, many football fans have collectively won a real say over the manner in which their clubs are run. So far over 170 trusts have been established using the democratic, not-for-profit Community Benefit Society model, of which around 50 have representatives on the board of their club.

Premiership Club Swansea City AFC is, as of 2012/13, the most high profile example of the involvement of a supporters' trust in the direct running of a club, with the Swansea City Supporters Trust owning 20% of the team and responsible for saving their club. Also notable are Scottish Premier League Dundee FC, the first fan-owned club in the top tier of any league in the UK; and Football League clubs AFC Wimbledon, Exeter City and Wycombe Wanderers: not just in existence, but thriving under supporter ownership. In 2013, Portsmouth FC's fans took over their club, saving it from administration.

There are now also fan-owned rugby league and ice hockey clubs and Supporters Direct is working across 20 European countries. Fan ownership is of course not a new concept in much of Europe – major clubs such as Barcelona and Real Madrid and the teams of the German Bundesliga are fan-owned. The NFL's Green Bay Packers in Wisconsin have demonstrated the success of fan ownership in North America.

Labour's 2010 manifesto included a pledge that:

*Registered Supporters Trusts [be] enabled to buy stakes in their club bringing mutualism to the heart of football.*

and

*We will promote the use of community shares that support investment in football clubs, pubs, renewable energy and shops.*

**Governments in Westminster, Holyrood and Cardiff should work with the Football Association and the Scottish and Welsh Football Associations to ensure that, where supporters' trusts have been established, they should be given a direct say in the running of the club through being able to elect a member of the club's board or equivalent body. The Welsh Government should also encourage the development of Supporters Direct Wales.**

### Case Study – Exeter City Supporters’ Trust

Exeter City Supporters’ Trust is one of a small number of football clubs in the country that are 75% owned by its fans. In fact, as a League One club they are the most successful majority Trust owned club in the Football League.

The fans took over the club fully in 2003, but the road to the fans getting full ownership took a little longer.

A group of dedicated supporters got together to establish a supporters’ trust in 2001 so that the fans could input into the running of the club, which was then in private ownership.

As the club continued to struggle on and off the pitch leading to financial problems, the supporters’ trust decided it was time to go further than just supporting the club and strived to take ownership. They worked with the members to get their support for taking ownership.

When, in 2003 the directors of the club were arrested due to financial irregularities within the club, the supporters’ trust took over the club entirely.

Now, ten years on from the initial formation of the supporters’ trust, Exeter City has over 3,000 members, many of whom are active on a regular basis. One such trust member, Di Lee, has just been named as League One Fan of the Year due to the amount of voluntary work she undertakes for her club. Membership costs from just £24 a year, giving people the chance to own a piece of their football club.

Between them they elect a board from amongst the community, set the strategic direction of the club and make key decisions. And many members get involved in everything from offering professional expertise and fundraising to painting the stands – the kinds of things fans would only do if they owned the club.

Andy Cole is the Chair of the Exeter City Supporters’ Trust, and he explains why other football clubs should consider the benefits of community ownership and the co-operative principles of Trust ownership. Andy said,

“Exeter City stands poised to finish this season in its highest ever league position. Last season we achieved our highest attendances for 40 years, and have enjoyed successive promotions and two recent visits to Wembley. We have achieved success whilst living within our financial means, and last season we turned over a small profit. In the past ten years our fans have invested over £1M into their football club. We are different because we are a community owned football club and we are very proud to sing on the terraces that ‘We own our football club’. The future of our club isn’t solely in the hands of one wealthy individual but ownership is shared among thousands of members. Our football club is living proof that co-operatives work in many different types of businesses – even football clubs”.

Source: [www.exetercityfc.co.uk](http://www.exetercityfc.co.uk)

### Major Sporting Events

We pushed to extend the concept of fan participation to the 2012 Olympics. The essence of the Olympic Games is the fellowship of citizens, built on partnership and democratic participation. This would have involved the national sporting community, the citizens of London and the wider public being enabled to

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play a partnership role in the running of the Games. A membership based community group, uniting the shared ambitions of the key bid partners, the people of London, and beyond would have created the People's Games.

We believe this model can be used for future major sporting events, many of which require huge public investment and upheaval. These could include the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

As a genuine community mutual, The People's Games would give individuals the right to become members. It would be structured so that all stakeholders have a voice, in addition to the key Games partners: Government, local and devolved government and the development authorities.

The People's Games would provide a genuine forum for informing and where appropriate, consulting with citizens, and a focus for ensuring that the link with UK citizens remains strong. It would also give rights to all stakeholders and guarantee that the event would reflect their interests, and have representation on the decision-making bodies that are organising and developing them.

## **CULTURE**

A similar approach to participation in sport should be taken towards the UK's cultural institutions, where it is vital that those who invest passion, energy and commitment should be involved in running them.

The Co-operative Party welcomes the 'duty to involve' that has been placed on the Arts Council, English Heritage, and The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. Yet it is as important for individual institutions to ensure that the opinions of people who care about them are heard at the point where decisions are made. Governments should work with these organisations to ensure that ordinary members of the public play a greater role in running the nation's museums, theatres, libraries and other cultural institutions.

### **Cultural Heritage**

Parts of our physical heritage are operated on a membership based model that could be seen to lack the real engagement or accountability to their public supporters that the co-operative movement would recognise. These include the National Trust and English Heritage. The Conservative Party has already trailed the notion of allowing the development of mutuals and co-operatives in the public sector and this has begun to pass into the public consciousness. The Labour Party and a Labour Government should consider driving the next evolutionary step, bringing forward legislation to establish a "presumption in favour" of co-operative and mutual solutions. This should be encouraged through the use of "Mutual Impact Assessment" (MIA), similar in approach to an equality impact assessment.

The current financial climate has placed ever greater pressures on the land and other assets of sporting and cultural bodies. In 2003, the Labour Scottish Executive introduced the Land Reform (Scotland) Act, providing a Community Right to Buy for rural communities in Scotland. This enables rural communities with a population of less than 10,000 to establish a community body and register an interest in land and buildings, providing the option to buy when the land or buildings come up for sale, following a community ballot. This should be extended to England and to Wales, in both urban and rural areas, to create an opportunity for community groups to bid for land and buildings of cultural, sporting or strategic significance to a community.

### Media

#### Broadcasting

The BBC is the largest broadcasting corporation in the world and a pillar of Britain's cultural life. We are committed to the BBC and to ensuring that it remains an excellent and greatly valued public service broadcaster.

Yet the aftermath of a series of scandals has led many to question how responsive the BBC is to members of the public. The replacement of the board of governors with the BBC Trust in January 2009 was the first step to increasing its credentials as the voice of the license payer. Unfortunately, this has not gone far enough. The Trust has had a mixed beginning with many commentators questioning the degree to which its governance is working in providing an effective challenge to the BBC executive.

Putting all arguments regarding the current arrangements to one side, the BBC should be accountable to license holders for one simple reason alone – because we pay for it. With huge sums of money spent annually the public deserves to have more of a say on the package of services and programmes that are delivered.

For the BBC to become truly accountable, all television license holders must be given the right to become individual members of the BBC Trust. As a genuine mutual venture, the Trust would then give all of its members the right to elect representatives to the Trust board. BBC staff, the Government and other stakeholders would also be represented to ensure all interests are taken into account.

The BBC Trust would be structured so that all of its members have a voice. This could provide a genuine forum for informing and consulting with citizens. It would provide a medium through which TV licence holders could express their views on the services that the BBC provides and a focus for ensuring that its links with viewers remain strong.

Radio has greater possibilities for localisation and democratisation though the development of co-operatively owned community DAB stations

#### Local newspapers

The Co-operative Party welcomes recent discussions on media ownership and in particular the proposal that co-operative structures could be used to rescue local newspapers and bring trust back into the newspaper business, as set out in the Co-operatives UK document *Good News: A co-operative solution to the media crisis*.

The *West Highland Free Press* and the *New Internationalist* are worker-owned publications already in existence, with *The Morning Star* and *The Co-operative News* both co-operatively owned newspapers.

### Community Public Houses

Pubs can be a source of community activity and cohesiveness. Community owned and operated pubs have become an important option for communities. The Co-operative Party commends the work of Co-operatives UK and the Plunkett Foundation in promoting a sustainable community models. Restrictive practise and covenants within the industry such as 'golden brick' contracts that could inhibit community

pubs should be re-assessed to ensure that a level playing field exists between private interest and community assets.

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT

## Leisure Services

Councils are suffering one of the tightest spending rounds in recent history, and budgets for cultural and leisure services such as leisure centres and swimming pools are coming under significant pressure.

Through converting important centres of local culture and recreation into 'community benefit' co-ops, run by their members, there is a real opportunity to anchor them firmly in the communities that they serve. A strong membership base can make the difference between important community assets being kept alive or being left out to die. A community co-operative can act as a vehicle to unite the aspirations of a large and active membership – and ensure that our lidos and bowling greens do not become things of the past.

### **Case Study – Oldham Community Leisure**

Oldham Community Leisure is a not for profit community benefit society that was established in 2002. It works with employee representatives on the board and any money that is made stays within in the organisation and is re-invested in facilities. The business model is successful and efficient. They have increased their turnover from three million to seven million pounds, and have improved employment and sickness rates. The enterprise has been successful despite the fact that the grant it receives is still at the level set in 2002. This is a very strong achievement given they have had to incur rising costs, and yet they have managed to install new gyms at Saddleworth and Glodwick.

The chief executive Ian Kendall has praised the staff for their achievement, and said that they are focused on delivering better health outcomes.

Source: Oldham Community Leisure  
[www.oclactive.co.uk](http://www.oclactive.co.uk)

### **Case Study – Greenwich Leisure Ltd.**

In 1993, Greenwich Council needed to find a new way to run its leisure centres because of public spending cuts, and came up with a new model. The first trust of its kind in UK leisure, GLL, was born. Seven centres were transferred, and success quickly followed. GLL created jobs and added new services to existing leisure centres. Since then, they have built many new facilities in the UK and membership has gone from about 7,000 to nearly 450,000 with tens of millions of visitors every year. In 1996, GLL began expanding outside Greenwich and now runs all kinds of community services and spaces across the UK.

GLL is owned by its staff and Society members, who have a non-dividend-paying share in GLL. That means the workforce is empowered, motivated and involved in making important decisions that affect the company. The majority of the Board are elected by the workforce.

Source: GLL Ltd [www.gll.org](http://www.gll.org)

Co-operatives and mutuals are ideally placed to provide best value. They provide local jobs and retain profits in the locality – thus promoting economic development – and give workers and users a real interest

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in how the service is run. Councils that have transferred their leisure direct services organisations to co-operatives, for example, have found that services that were financial liabilities threatened with cuts to provision have become much greater revenue earners, even expanding provision.

Local authorities should actively consider transferring leisure and cultural services to community benefit societies with open and democratic membership. This legal structure can be asset locked, which can ensure that any assets transferred cannot be disposed of unless they were to fulfil the same cultural or leisure aims as originally intended.

### Case Study – Portishead Open Air pool

First opened in 1961, Portishead Open Air Pool was re-opened in May 2009. Now managed by the Portishead Pool Community Trust, the pool had previously been run by DC Leisure on behalf of North Somerset Council. Situated in the Lakegrounds in Portishead, the 33.3 x 12 metres pool enjoys panoramic views over the Bristol Channel and features sun terraces with views over a wide expanse of water and countryside.

The Trust has a five person board, all of whom have full time jobs in other fields. The day to day management is carried out by a full time pool manager, 5 full time and 9 casual professional lifeguards.

The local authority initially transferred the pool to the Trust for one year with the option of a 99 year lease if the Trust could establish that the pool could be sustainable. Supporters of the pool are being encouraged to become members of the Trust. Two categories of membership have been offered - annual membership and founder membership.

The founder Swimming Pools membership also offers lifetime membership and is designed to encourage people to pay upfront, thereby strengthening cash flow during the early stages under new management.

Membership is open to all everyone, whether residents or otherwise. Each member has the right to vote, the right to stand for election to the committee and the right to have a say in the future direction of the pool.

### Libraries

The Co-operative Party notes the growing interest in co-operatively run libraries. With the massive cuts faced by local councils threatening the very existence of many of their services, some local authorities have looked at using new models to save local libraries. The Co-operative Party opposes a Tory-style de-professionalised volunteer-run 'Big Society' library service. However, there are models that ensure a greater role for the community in a local professionally staffed library service. The Upper Norwood Library serving the London Boroughs of Lambeth and Croydon provides a model of an independent library trust safeguarding its services for the future. Other models for community and co-operative library services that can be used as best practice guidance come from the work of the Lincolnshire Co-operative Society and Greenwich Leisure library services'.

### Parks and open spaces

Parks and open spaces are a focal point for communities, yet we rarely have a say in how they are run. Research indicates that this is a source of dissatisfaction for many, with more than half of the population want a say in the way that parks and open spaces are run in their communities.

Local authorities should explore the use of community land trusts for parks and open spaces. This will not only give the community greater ownership over their parks and open spaces but also ensure that the land remains in their hands for perpetuity. Labour should also review the way in which the UK's National Parks are governed, to ensure that they are accountable to the people who use them. There is also a strong case for the governance structure of Parks to be widened to ensure some accountability for users who are reside outside the immediate area.

Most allotment societies are already incorporated as co-operatives

## The Co-operative Party

The Co-operative Party is the Party of social justice.

**We believe** that people will achieve more by working together than they can by working alone. We support the efforts of those who seek success through that co-operative endeavour.

**We believe** that the only way to create a just and fair society is through power being spread evenly throughout society, and not arbitrarily based on wealth, class, gender or race.

**We work** to promote co-operatives and all forms of mutual organisation.

**We work** in partnership with the Labour Party as its sister party to achieve these ends.

In addition to hundreds of Labour and Co-operative Councillors across England, Scotland and Wales, there are currently 32 Labour/Co-operative MPs, and members in the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and the House of Lords.