

# 2018 Policy discussion paper

## Britain Leaving the European Union

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### Using this document

- The Co-operative Party's annual policy consultation process is an opportunity to have your say on the Party's position on key issues.
- Submissions made via the process over the year form the starting point for debates at regional conferences throughout the year and at National Conference, which is held in October.
- Party officers are strongly encouraged to arrange a policy discussion for your local party on either or both policy topics. The questions at the end of this worksheet can form the basis for a discussion at your meeting.
- Submissions should be made online at <https://party.coop/policy/new/submit/> or by email to [policy@party.coop](mailto:policy@party.coop) by 30th June

### Context

Ahead of the EU Referendum, the Co-operative Party's annual conference voted to support remaining in the European Union. In line with this, the Party did all it could to encourage members and supporters to vote remain during the referendum campaign.

The result was therefore extremely disappointing. The Party's role now is to do all it can to support the co-operative movement during the months and years ahead as Britain leaves the EU, working with members, Co-ops UK and our subscribing societies. This does not mean that our policy development and consultation seek to replay the debate of the referendum campaign – but to ensure that co-operative values and principles, and the co-operative movement, are at the forefront in shaping what comes next.

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The vote to leave the EU on the 23 June 2016 was a watershed moment in British politics – and while it has shown the UK to be a divided nation, there there's one thing we all agree on: that the status quo isn't working. The Co-operative Party believes there is a growing consensus that we need to change how our economy works so that employees, consumers, and communities receive their fair share of the wealth they help create.

Internationalism has always been at the heart of the co-operative movement, and the European Union is a particularly powerful example of international co-operation. By working together with other European countries, it has been possible to tackle issues which are important to the co-operative movement, and which reach beyond our borders, from tax justice, to climate change, to Fairtrade.

For co-operative businesses, the EU plays an important role too. The 1957 Treaty of Rome, one of the EU's founding documents, contained the right for co-operative business to exist within the EU. Since then the role and impact of mutual and co-operative societies, has expanded considerably. A report by the European Commission's Co-operative Working Group says that more than 250,000 enterprises across Europe are co-operatives, owned by a total of 163 million individual member-owners, and providing jobs to 5.4 million of the EU's citizens.

Co-operative businesses in the UK operate across all sectors which will each see specific impacts from Brexit – from co-operative farmers who rely on significant numbers of EU workers, high food standards and protection from the market being flooded with cheap imports, to co-operative retailers who need fresh food deliveries to have easy passage through our borders to ensure consumers can buy fresh food.

In many communities, people feel left behind and dissatisfied with the status quo. Trickle-down economics isn't delivering its rewards to many regions in the UK – particularly those regions with the highest number of people voting to leave the EU.

To regenerate these regional economies from the bottom up, public organisations need to make the public pound work harder by changing the way they buy goods and services and supporting the growth of the local co-operative sector. Much of the law governing how public bodies in the UK procure goods and services is European.

While in the short term, the uncertainty about which organisations and frameworks the UK will remain a member of create some transitional instability for these public bodies, Brexit may afford the UK the opportunity to determine some of our own unique approaches to competition, procurement and state aid. For example, the Co-operative Party has long championed a strengthening of the Social Value Act – our ability to put this into practice may, in the longer term, be within reach.

## Consultation purpose

This policy consultation has three main purposes – it will seek to:

1. Better understand the immediate impact for the co-operative movement and co-operative businesses, propose ways to mitigate and manage this to support the sector to continue to thrive, and to look for opportunities for collaboration and the co-operative movement in the long term.
2. Develop a 'new internationalism' based on co-operation and fairness and explore our future relationships with our neighbours and partners around the world, to ensure that Britain remains outwardly focused and engaged with the world post-Brexit.
3. Look for opportunities to reshape Britain to create a co-operative nation where wealth and power are shared - a co-operative response to the Leave campaign's narrative of "take back control", looking at longer term opportunities to reshape Britain and its economy, once Brexit negotiations and their immediate impacts have passed.

## Consultation questions

1. Did your local community vote to stay or leave the EU? Why do you think they voted the way they did, and how do we develop a co-operative response to their concerns and aspirations?
2. How can co-operative values and principles shape our future relationship with Europe and the rest of the world?
3. In which areas do you think it is most important to maintain co-operation with the EU?
4. Are there any opportunities to improve our policies, regulation and legislation if European law no longer applies in the UK?
5. Which sectors and communities do you think are most at risk from Britain leaving the EU? How do you think national, devolved, regional and local government should support and protect them?
6. How can we build the UK's post-Brexit economy into one of fairness and co-operation?