

Co-operative Change

the co-operative party
2024 platform



Co-operative Change

We need co-operative change.

Ahead of the General Election 2024, this platform pulls together some of the key aspects of the Co-operative Party's work, the Party's full policy contributions can be seen on the Publications page on our website.

We believe co-operation can and must play a larger role in the social and economic life of the United Kingdom.

At the Co-operative Party, we know the benefits the co-operative model brings to individuals, businesses and communities in the UK and abroad. The co-operative movement delivers good jobs, high quality services and sustainable goods to communities in almost every nation, as a global movement of over 1 billion members.

We are ambitious for the co-operative movement's future prospects in the industries of tomorrow. In the future, Britain will need cleaner energy to achieve net zero, greater social care provision for our aging population and more innovative technology to stay competitive in a global economy. Co-operatives can play a pivotal role in achieving these ambitions and more – ensuring a fairer, more prosperous economy throughout Britain. We want to see the UK co-operative sector develop to the level of other comparable advanced economies, such as France, Germany and Switzerland.

A programme of national renewal will need to rebuild local government and empower communities. People want to feel they can effect change in their local area – whether that's on their high street, in their local economy or to their local services. Co-operative politics gets to the heart of this – by ensuring communities have the rights, powers and resources to make meaningful decisions which change lives. We believe now is the moment for co-operative ideas.

A vote for a Labour and Co-operative candidate will ensure these co-operative solutions can be put into action on a national scale – helping to deliver the change Britain desperately needs.

The next general election provides us with the opportunity to create a greener, fairer nation – where wealth and power are shared. Let's achieve this together, by building co-operation at home and abroad.

Joe Fortune

General Secretary of Co-operative Party

Our Key Priorities



Co-operative Growth: Double the size of the co-operative sector

Co-op growth will enable a fairer, greener, more democratic and resilient economy. The Co-operative Party believes there should be a doubling of the size of the co-operative sector. In order to achieve this the sector will need supportive legislation, regulation, development support and access to finance.



Community Owned Energy Generation: Achieve the rapid and exponential growth in community owned renewable energy in every community

Support the creation of community owned renewable energy schemes in every community in order to generate 8GW of clean, green community owned energy which will lower bills, decarbonise the economy and create 1 million new owners of energy.



Support and grow local ownership: Introduce a new Community Right to Buy and strengthened localism powers

Legislating for a new Community Right to Buy will strengthen the powers local communities have to purchase, save and redevelop much loved local institutions such as music venues, shops, pubs, sports clubs or land.



Better protect retail workers and create safer high streets: Introduce new offences to ensure investigations are carried out.

A new offence for violence against shopworkers will be a major step in reducing endemic retail crime across the country. Workers deserve the right to safety and respect at work. Communities deserve the right to access essential goods and services without fear of crime.

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Re-building economic growth

The last ten years have seen the UK slide into economic stagnation, with widening inequality and depressed wages lowering living standards across the country. With some of the worst wealth and income inequality in the OECD, millions are being left behind – unable to fulfil their potential. Growing the co-operative economy is vital to achieving a fairer, more prosperous Britain, with strong and sustainable growth.

Rebuilding economic growth will require a plan to grow the co-operative economy in every sector. A numerical doubling the size of the co-operative economy will help to spread good, well-paid jobs across the nation – rejuvenating the everyday economy people rely on.





Creating the conditions for rapid co-operative growth

The legislative, regulatory and financial environment will need modernisation and development support – creating a level playing field between co-operatives and other forms of business. By transforming the UK into the most co-operative friendly nation, a Labour & Co-operative Government can unleash co-operative growth in every sector, region and community.

In order to achieve this co-operative growth, there will need to be:

- Modern and supportive legislative framework to support co-operatives.
- Regulation which encourages diverse ownership and allows for co-operative expansion.
- An increase in development support and capacity for existing co-operatives and start-up co-operatives
- New access to finance and capital instruments for new and existing co-operatives.

Other aspects of co-operative growth should include:

- Integrated support for co-operatives across government departments
- Streamlined and supportive mechanisms for business transition to co-operative models
- Enhanced protections against demutualisation
- Ensuring mainstream business support caters for co-operative and alternative business models.

Growing co-operative development capacity

There is a clear need for greater development support and capacity for new co-operatives and diverse business start-ups. To aid local and regional growth this co-operative development support should be situated within wider local and regional economic development and strategies. This will help to ensure start-up and existing co-operatives have access to practical support and advice which can

facilitate their creation, growth and diversification. Co-operative development services could include financial advice, legal advice, and wider signposting to other key stakeholders. The localisation of these services will help to ensure advice is closely tailored to the needs and specialisations of local economies.

There is a need to review the cost and method of setting up a co-operative as opposed to a private business. Currently co-operatives are nearly nine times more expensive to set up as compared to a business registering with Companies House. This could include whether co-operatives become registered by Companies House rather than the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), as is currently the case but remain regulated by the FCA in line with other business forms.

New finance for co-ops

Access to finance has been a major impediment to co-operative growth for many years, despite the obvious benefits of the model. Barriers must be removed to appropriate finance for co-operatives. This includes trying new financial instruments, establishing better routes of patient capital investment into co-operatives and enhancing the understanding of the co-operative model within the financial sector.

The Law Commission’s review into Co-operatives & Community Benefit Societies will cover options for capital raising and access to finance. The **upcoming recommendations from the Law Commission on capital raising should be implemented** when published. They should include the creation of perpetual shares which are transferable but not withdrawable; new models to enable external investment; and greater clarity on repayable shares and withdrawable shares.

Australia has recently introduced the Mutual Capital Instrument, which allows mutual organisations to access investment more easily without losing their mutual status. There is a clear case for the introduction of a similar **new mutual capital instrument in the UK**, which allows the provision of non-member investment which provides capital for



limited return but no participation rights. This should enable raising of an unlimited amount of capital to generate larger capital raising for co-operatives starting up or wishing to expand. It should be classed as equity, rather than a liability under the relevant accounting standards.

Boosting co-operative start-ups

A new environment which supports co-operative startups to develop, attain capital and expand will be essential. At present, the UK's startup support apparatus does not adequately serve the co-operative sector - with business and financial advisors often being unaware of the requirements of co-operatives and the unique aspects of the co-operative model. A new generation of startup co-operatives can be developed by reforming the existing business support system, introducing new financial mechanisms which work for the co-operative model and by establishing incentives which facilitate co-operative growth.

Startup incentives

New business tax incentives are required to help encourage investment in co-operatives and other forms of social business. This could include the **development of a new improved tax incentive scheme for co-operatives and social businesses**, building on the lessons learned from the Social Investment Tax Relief (SITR) and the Community Investment Tax Relief (CITR). Both the SITR and CITR provided tax relief to investors who support social business in disadvantaged areas - this could be reformulated in a way which helps to unlock growth within the co-operative sector. To aid co-operative growth, there could be tax relief introduced on profits reinvested into asset-locked co-operatives, community benefit societies or community interest companies. Furthermore, as Community Benefit Societies (CBS) operate as non-profit businesses that exist for social purpose, they could be exempt from Corporation Tax.

Preventing demutualisation

Failure to protect mutual and co-operative models has been a key reason why the British co-operative sector has fallen behind comparative advanced economies, such as France, The Netherlands and New Zealand, with many building societies demutualising in the 1980s and 1990s.

The **introduction of indivisible shares** would grant significant new protections against demutualisation. Indivisible shares would enshrine the principle of 'disinterested distribution' – which is prevalent in countries with sizeable co-operative economies. As indivisible shares cannot be monetized or distributed to individual members, they deter predatory forces and reduce demutualisation. Combined these measures would enable co-operatives to reduce financing costs, increase the ability for co-operatives to raise capital quickly and build long-term business resilience.

Unleashing a Co-operative Industrial Strategy

In recent years, there has been renewed consensus across the globe on the importance of manufacturing and industry to all economies – with a particular focus on technological development and high value manufacturing. Under the next Labour & Co-operative Government a new agenda can be established to rebuild high value manufacturing, which takes advantage of technological development to deliver good, well-paid jobs across the country.

Labour has begun this process by producing an Industrial Strategy – *Prosperity Through Partnership*, confronting some of the biggest socio-economic challenges the UK faces. Labour's Industrial Strategy focuses on delivering clean power by 2030, harnessing data for public good, caring for the future and building a resilient economy. Prosperity through Partnership recognises the contribution of co-operatives as progressive business models, which provide corporate governance that ensures "the interests of all stakeholders are considered, including workers,



communities and the environment”. Labour’s Industrial Strategy is a clear call to action for the co-operative movement, which is ready to rise to the challenges Britain faces and engage in the delivery of an Industrial Strategy. In the delivery of an Industrial Strategy, co-operatives should have appropriate access to support and incentives for decarbonisation, R&D and technological innovation. Partnership opportunities with universities and research centres should be accessible to co-operatives and mutuals, with the co-operative model being encouraged in university spin-outs.

Mutual Guarantee Societies (MGSs)

The UK co-operative and SME community currently does not have the benefit of Mutual Guarantee Societies – which are commonplace throughout Europe. MGSs bring together co-operatives and SMEs into a mutual model in which they can work together to receive lending from financial institutions at good rates and other external investments. MGSs work by having members guarantee other members for their liabilities while lending, strengthening the position of individual members to raise investment from external sources.

The UK currently has only one form of MGS – the British Business Bank – holding back the ability of co-operatives and SMEs to raise investment. There is a case for **new Government legislation to create MGSs**, so that co-operatives & SMEs can come together to receive preferential funding.

Growing the co-operative and mutual financial services sector

Financial inclusion and access to vital financial services are critical to everyone. Fair finance, which works in the interests of consumers, helps to ensure people can have the living standards they deserve and the ability to invest and care for their family and loved ones.

The current financial system currently fails to deliver for many people and families across the UK, with

people being left out from services such as loans, mortgages, and other financial products.

To reform our financial system, the co-operative model will need to be at the heart of how financial institutions operate. There is a rich history of co-operative financial institutions, such as credit unions, building societies and co-operative banks. Unfortunately, in recent decades the British credit union and building society sectors have experienced ongoing demutualization, outdated regulation and a lack of government support which has weakened the sector and hindered growth.

Championing the credit union sector

Credit unions provide vitally important financial services for their members in a democratic model. The Co-operative Party would like to see the credit union sector expand in line with Labour’s Financial Services Review recommendations. This should include facilitating credit unions to provide further products to members and **placing a duty on regulators to ensure the needs of credit unions and mutual financial services are met on a level playing field** with other financial institutions.

Credit union growth can be achieved by **redefining the common bond**. All credit unions are governed by a common bond - whether it be geographical, employment based or another factor - which collectively binds members together. A redefinition of the common bond would enable greater mergers of credit unions, helping to expand their size, reach and liquidity – enabling them to compete and grow.

Central and local government could support their workers and the credit union sector by establishing payroll deduction facilities for all public sector workers. This would be an auto-enrolment into a credit union, with a worker becoming a member of the credit union and having access to affordable financial services.



Supporting Building Societies

The building society sector has long been a staple of our high streets, but the sector requires the modernisation of regulation. In line with Labour's Financial Services Review, the Co-operative Party would like to see the **modernisation of the Building Societies Act – changing which fund sources count towards building societies retail funding limits**. As with credit unions, a duty could be placed on regulators to meet the requirements of the building society sector and establish a level playing field with other financial institutions.

Supporting community banking

Co-operative community banks are prevalent in other major advanced economies, most notably in Germany. Representing one of the three pillars of the German banking system and over two thirds of all retail banks, the German Co-operative Financial Group plays a vital role in lending to SMEs and consequently to economic development. **The Government should aim for the long-term development of co-operative and community banking**, with the objective of creating a community banking network to facilitate regional economic growth and local business development. Support could be given to emerging community banking initiatives, including Bank Cambria in Wales and Avon Mutual in South West England.

Growing employee ownership

Employee ownership has been rapidly growing in recent years, with an average annual growth rate of 16% over the decade from 2011. Employee ownership – whether it be a true employee-owned trust (EOT) or worker co-operative – helps to spread ownership to workers, providing an equity stake in their business.

To support ongoing sector growth, the Government can set an ambitious target for growth and increase tailored business support for new and existing employee owned firms. The Government can **enhance the incentives currently in place for**

employee ownership transition, strengthening and future-proofing the EOT model which has facilitated growth of the sector since its introduction in 2014. Increasing the tax reliefs available within the EOT model would encourage greater uptake of the model by employees and existing business owners looking to transition. This could include improving the tax free employee bonus in line with inflation.

There is a clear case for **introducing new capital raising options through the British Business Bank (BBB), including providing partial loan guarantees to help EOT transitions**.

The Government should review the existing all-employee share ownership schemes, the Share Incentive Plan (SIP) and Save As You Earn (SAYE), with the ambition to have these taken up by more employees and employers. This could include reducing the SIP holding period, removing penalties for early leavers, expanding schemes to all workers, including gig workers, and introducing a new auto-enrolment for employees in companies which have existing SAYE & SIP schemes.



Fair Taxes

Our public services rely on the taxation revenue the British economy and taxpayer generates. Whether it's our hospitals, GPs, schools or roads, it requires everyone to contribute to deliver the goods and services people rely on from cradle to grave.

Fair Tax Mark

The co-operative movement has been a pioneer for fair tax conduct – with many of the UK's leading co-operative societies being early adopters of the Fair Tax Mark.

The Fair Tax Mark commits businesses to tax transparency and policies which ensure the organisation pays the appropriate amount of tax on its activities - both domestically and globally. Fair Tax accreditation helps businesses to stand out for ethical conduct and ESG, boosting a company's status to public sector institutions, government and consumers. **The Co-operative Party supports the wider adoption of the Fair Tax Mark – which could be encouraged by central and local government.**

Fair Tax councils

Local government can play an important role too in promoting fair tax conduct. Led by Labour and Co-As of 2024, operative councillors, the Fair Tax Declaration has now been signed by over 50 local councils in England, Scotland and Wales. Local government leadership on fair tax can help to spread responsible tax conduct and transparency to local private sector firms. Co-operative Party believe. There is a case for reforming procurement processes so local authorities be able to take a firm's tax affairs into account when making procurement decisions as part of its procurement processes.

Action on tax havens

A new Government will need to take action to end the economic damage tax havens cause to both developed and developing countries, primarily through the practice of Base-Erosion Profit Shifting

(BEPS). The introduction of country by country tax reporting would significantly damp the ability of companies to engage in BEPS. To accompany this change to the tax system, the UK could work on further international efforts to reduce tax avoidance – including supporting and further developing the Global Minimum Corporate Tax.

Creating a better workplace

The next Labour Government is committed to delivering a new deal for workers, helping to end precarious employment and ensuring rights at work. There is a need to overturn 15 years of real wage stagnation – which has harmed people's ability to deal with inflation, the rising cost of living and purchase assets.

British workers require a new deal – which helps to restore wage growth, aggregate demand, productivity increases and living standards across the UK. Without this the UK will fall further into economic stagnation and ever widening inequality. The Government will need to ensure workers have training and education opportunities to engage with new technological innovation, such as Artificial Intelligence, including lifelong learning provision.

Gig economy

The rise of tech companies and online retailers over the last decade has seen a substantial expansion of people working in the Gig Economy across the UK. The Trade Unions Congress (TUC) estimated there were approximately 4.4 million people working at least once a week in a gig economy role in 2021, representing about 15% of the working population. This represents a major challenge to maintaining the rights of workers across all sectors – with many receiving few if any rights through their gig economy roles.



Platform co-operatives

One way of ensuring gig workers receive fair rights and conditions would be **supporting the development of Platform Co-operatives**, which are co-operatively-owned technology platforms, such as apps and online services. Platform co-operatives ensure emergent technologies are delivered in a democratic model, which operates in favour of workers and consumers. A new Government could support existing and start-up platform co-operatives which provide a genuine, democratic alternative to existing firms. Ensuring appropriate technical, financial, innovation and business support, as well as a supportive regulatory environment will facilitate the growth of the platform co-operative sector.

Freelance co-operatives & agency worker co-operatives

With a rising number of people classed as self-employed, there has already been a move towards self-employed professionals coming together to create freelance co-operatives. These freelance co-operatives help to provide self-employed people with business support, financial advice and administrative support – reducing the difficulties of managing microbusinesses.

With over 4.3 million people self-employed, there is need for more freelance co-operatives. Local business support services could aim to encourage the creation of new freelance co-operatives and signpost individuals looking to join one.

As with self-employed workers, there could be support for agency workers to organise into agency worker co-operatives. These could be supported by giving preference to agency worker co-operatives over commercial alternatives in the public procurement of temporary workers.

Employment co-operatives

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) could review the potential for employment co-operatives for people on benefits, including Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). The new structures

would enable unemployed people to retain the security of their benefits payments while they commence as self-employed workers and provide them access to the services and mutual support of the employment co-operative.

Corporate governance reform

There should be a requirement for employee representation on corporate boards on all publicly listed companies, bringing the UK in line with many of its European peers. There should further be a duty to involve employees at a workplace level – encouraging worker voice – which has been shown to be an effective approach to improving productivity, job satisfaction and staff retention. The Government should also review the merits of appointing consumers to corporate boards, in order to help ensure fair and appropriate best practice for consumers.

These new rights would support the vital work trade unions undertake on behalf of their members and employees across the country. The Co-operative Party would like to see a wider expansion of trade union membership, representation and recognition within the UK economy.

Transparency is also key and there should be an amendment to company law to require companies to report on environmental and social impact as well as their bottom line, giving consumers, employees and shareholders the information they need to be able to make informed decisions on purchasing and investing with a company.



Ensuring consumer protection

Co-operative Party MPs played a pivotal role in establishing the foundations of Britain's consumer rights and protections over 60 years ago, with the passage of the Weights & Measures Act 1963. Ever since then the Co-operative Party has worked to enhance consumer protections which raise standards, improve quality and deliver fair value.

New consumer co-operatives

Consumer co-operatives have been delivering for their members for over a century. As member-led organisations, they ensure consumers interests are always central to their business practices. Common across the economy, consumer co-operatives have been working for consumers in retail and energy to ensure they receive a fair deal.

As part of the doubling of the size of the co-operative sector across the UK, there could be a focus on building co-operative development capacity for new consumer co-operatives.

Competition & market reform

The Competition & Markets Authority (CMA) can perform a greater role in building a fairer, greener, more dynamic economy. The Government could establish a new remit for the CMA to develop and maintain corporate diversity of ownership – promoting business models beyond privately-held and publicly traded companies. This could include a wide-range of social economy models – co-operatives, employee-owned firms, social enterprise, and more.

It is vital that the CMA remains responsive to consumer concerns, acts on the priorities of consumers and works closely with other consumer champions. Introducing an annual 'Competition Health Check' would ensure markets are reformed and competitive. In markets where failure is identified by regulators or the CMA, additional support could be given to the development of new consumer co-operatives as new competitive providers.

Advocacy, information & transparency

Access to advice and advocacy services holds significant importance. Independent advice can play a crucial role in helping consumers comprehend their rights and resolve issues. It is recommended that statutory regulators be obligated to annually report on the availability of free independent advice for consumers within their sectors.

There is need for greater transparency for consumers to make informed decisions and overcome asymmetries of information. The Government could work with regulators to ensure an end to hidden charges, excessive fees and other malpractices which disadvantage consumers and prevent them from receiving a fair deal, whether that is a refund, a high quality good or service or a fair price.

Access to cash

Advanced economies are increasingly transitioning over to cashless payments, which has led to an increasing amount of high street banks and ATMs closing - reducing in the availability of cash. This has the biggest impact on those with the lowest incomes and the elderly – which are both more likely to be reliant on cash for payments.

The availability of ATMs will need to be ensured for those most reliant on cash payments. This will require working with banks and businesses hosting ATMs to keep them open. A review of ATM charges would be beneficial, with a view to reforming them or abolishing charges altogether.

Universal access to financial services & duty to service

The Government should aim to ensure all adults and households have access to basic financial services, such as a basic bank account, savings scheme and access to credit. There is clear need for a new Access to Banking Standard to be introduced to protect the continued existence of the "last bank in town". This could be enforced by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).



The UK could learn from internationally comparable nations, such as the United States, by introducing a British version of the Community Reinvestment Act. First introduced in the US in 1977, the Community Reinvestment Act ensures commercial banks meet the needs of borrowers from all backgrounds. One way of delivering this would be major commercial banks working with credit unions, Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) and co-operative community banks to ensure lower income communities had access to basic financial services provided by the co-operative and mutual financial services.

Rail & utilities reform

The current utilities and rail system requires significant reform. A new approach is required to ensure there is greater voice and accountability within these key services. In the future, the development of community energy will help to establish an energy system which is more democratic and locally owned. The poor record of the water industry shows the requirement for greater diversification of ownership, including mutual ownership models found both domestically and abroad. Railway reform should look to establish improved worker and consumer voice to deliver durable, high-quality services and employment.

Progressive procurement

In Britain and Europe, public procurement is now being used more effectively to grow the social economy – helping to create new social economy eco-systems which deliver good jobs and positive social impact. The UK Government could look to reform public procurement rules and tendering processes to take greater account of social value and impact – helping to end the undercutting of social economy providers by larger firms – which often engage in wage repression and other malpractices.

There is a strong case for decentralisation and devolution – giving local authorities and communities the powers to shape their local economies. Wealth retention strategies can be a part of this new agenda for economic growth – with local authorities and major ‘anchor institutions’, such as hospitals and universities, working with local co-operatives, SMEs and social enterprises to deliver locally-rooted goods and services.





Achieving the clean energy transition

With ever increasing record temperatures becoming the norm and the systemic loss of biodiversity devastating natural environments, it's clear there is an urgent need to speed up our clean energy transition and decarbonise the UK's society and economy.

Now it is time for further action which rethinks and reinvents our energy system – from generation and supply to usage and storage. The Co-operative Party supports Labour's ambition to make Britain a clean energy superpower – restoring our leadership in decarbonisation and renewable energy.

The new energy systems can to empower our communities – breaking away from the top down, fossil fuel systems of energy generation which have caused high energy prices and energy insecurity. Community renewable energy – owned and operated by local communities – will be a key part in the UK becoming a clean energy superpower.





Developing Community Energy

At a time of high energy prices and energy insecurity, community energy represents the opportunity to transform our energy system, empowering millions across the country. Community energy enables people to collectively generate and store renewable energy, through initiatives such as community owned wind turbines, solar panel installations and hydro projects. The democratic governance of community energy helps to promote people's participation in the energy system – so they can work collectively to decarbonise their homes, communities, and local economies.

The Government should aim to achieve the largest expansion of community energy in British history.

The Co-operative Party strongly support Labour's Local Power Plan, which will create up to a million new owners of renewable energy and lead to thousands of new jobs across the UK.

Under Labour's plan, GB Energy, a publicly-owned energy company, will invest in both community energy groups and local authorities to help develop community owned energy schemes. GB Energy will take a leading role in working with co-operatives, community groups and local authorities to deliver new community energy capacity – with the ambition to create 8GW of energy – equivalent to three new nuclear power stations.

To support these ambitious plans, an incoming government could introduce further measures which facilitate the development of community energy projects. This could include the reinstatement of Social Investment Tax Relief (SITR) for community energy projects, which would provide tax relief for new projects which often require significant upfront capital investment. Interest-free loans could be provided for low-income households to purchase shares in new community energy installations.

The wider public sector, including local authorities, can also incentivise community energy growth

by implementing procurement agreements with community energy projects. This could take the form of long-term power purchase agreements, which enable local authorities to purchase energy in advance at a fixed price - providing consistent and clear pricing for local authorities and certainty for community energy groups investing in new renewable energy capacity. This would serve as a community energy 'contract for difference' that can develop and sustain community energy schemes.

Safeguarding the environment and nature

It is vital to protect our environment and its rich biodiversity for future generations. The Government can take leadership to reduce our impact on the environment, creating protections for nature and biodiversity which will ensure its preservation. It's up to this generation to ensure future generations can enjoy a planet rich in nature, sustainable environments, and biodiversity.

Reducing waste

Plastic is one of the worst materials for waste disposal due to its inability to biodegrade. While action has begun to be taken, this needs to be accelerated through an ambitious plan. The Government should introduce a National Plastic Action Plan – which sets a target of reducing plastic pollution to zero. For some forms and uses of plastic, this could be an immediate ban and for others a progressive phase out.

Sections of the business community have already begun to take meaningful action and drive measures which reduce plastic usage – with the co-operative movement being leaders on this. Research shows co-operatives are already engaged in taking greater environmental action than other forms of business. The Government could support this innovation and best practice in environmental standards and waste reduction by businesses across the country.



A new environment plan

A new Environment Plan could develop and enhance the UK's current Biodiversity Framework – creating statutory targets and enacting legislation to ensure the UK's economic activity aims to improve and protect biodiversity, land use, soil protection, air quality and reforestation. This will help move the UK towards being a global leader in natural environment protection. This could be supported by Government investment in green technologies, green industries and decarbonisation of economic activity.

There is a need for reform of the National Adaptation Programme – which was established by the Labour Government's Climate Change Act 2008. The concept behind the National Adaptation Programme is ambitious and correct – however it fails to include appropriate timelines and evaluation. The Government could ensure the Programme provides clear targets, with regular evaluation of time-limited outcomes and objectives.

Co-operative solutions for rural communities

A Labour and Co-operative Government will need to take greater account of the challenges rural communities face, including poor infrastructure, lack of public services, reduced job opportunities and social isolation. A new Government will need to rural proof its legislative agenda to ensure a fairer, greener economy for all areas.

Strengthening rural democracy

Rural communities often feel left out of Government policy development. A new Government could respond by establishing a new Standing Commission to monitor departments and **'rural proof' policies across government**. This will help ensure rural communities' priorities and challenges are not forgotten during policy development.

Parish and town councils are essential to the governance and daily life of rural communities. The Government could strengthen these

institutions, giving them additional powers and participation in the development and management of local services. Greater training could be provided to parish and town councillors, helping to attract new representatives and improve performance.

A review could be conducted into the roll out of the devolved mayoral model to rural communities.

The new rural mayors could receive similar powers to those found in metropolitan areas – serving as local champions locally, regionally and nationally.

Farming, Fishing & Rural Economies

Agricultural and farming co-operatives are common across the globe – providing a significant portion of global agricultural produce in a model which gives farmers a stake and say in their industry.

Increasing support to the agricultural and farming co-operative sector would be highly beneficial to farmers and rural communities across the UK. As part of the doubling of the size of the overall co-operative sector, the Government could support the expansion of new and existing farming co-operatives – through new innovation funds, investment streams for growth and business development advice. This could be accompanied by the reform of the funds currently spent on direct payments to landowners – which could instead be put into an agricultural co-operative development fund. This would provide loans and grant funding for existing co-operatives to grow and new co-operatives to start up.

Adopting a comprehensive 'Farm to Fork' strategy will help support local agricultural producers to develop in a financially and environmentally sustainable way – supporting the nation's farming community by sourcing produce locally.

Fishing co-operatives have led the way in creating innovative solutions which have helped to grow the fishing sector, despite ongoing economic uncertainty. The Government could create a support structure which enables the growth of fishing co-operatives and facilitate innovation and technological development – enabling fishing co-operatives to remain competitive and deliver growth to coastal communities.





Making Britain's streets safe

With residents in many areas feeling unsafe in their local community and crime remaining high after 14 years of Conservative Government, the Labour Party has made making Britain's streets safe a key mission for Government. The Co-operative Party share this commitment to improving safety and restoring trust in our policing and justice system.





Tackling retail crime

The impact of retail crime hurts not only victims and staff, but communities, businesses and local economies. The ripple effect of retail crime harms business presence, high street vitality and local economic prosperity – making it a substantial impact on the communities who are affected. For workers, retail crime can have long term impacts on well-being and mental health.

During the pandemic violence against shop workers reached all-time highs, with shoplifting also becoming a significant issue in retail shops across the UK. In 2023, the Co-op Group reported over 1,000 incidents of crime in their shops every day demonstrating the scale of retail crime in the UK. Furthermore, the Co-op Group found 71% of serious retail crime was not responded to by police.

This is a completely unacceptable situation which puts workers at risk on a daily basis.

To tackle the scourge of retail crime, police forces will require investment so that they can ensure all reports of retail crime are properly investigated and a strong case is made for prosecution of repeat and persistent offenders. There should be a **standalone offence for violence against shopworkers in England** - as was introduced by the Protection of Workers Act in Scotland.

Police forces building partnerships with retailers has been effective in targeting repeat and persistent offenders using data collected by retailers. This is an innovative approach which reduces crime whilst using police time and resources efficiently. Greater government and local authority support could be made available for building these new partnerships.

Ending modern slavery

The Co-operative Party has been a long-term campaigner on ending modern slavery wherever is found. A new Government provides the opportunity to renew its commitment to tackling modern slavery, **including ensuring the vital role of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner is consistently staffed** so there is always an independent and strong advocate for victims of modern slavery.

Co-operative approaches to policing

Neighbourhood policing is one of the most visible forms of policing, which helps to build trust and confidence between policing authorities and communities. The austerity of the last decade has reduced neighbourhood policing numbers, making them less visible and accountable to communities. As such, there is a clear requirement to **rebuild and invest in neighbourhood policing**. This will require the expansion of PCSO numbers and the introduction of Safer Neighbourhood Panels – that bring representatives of the local community and police together to take action on local crime issues.

Implementing participatory budgeting ensures local people and communities have a genuine say in the decision-making process of police authorities. The Government could encourage further expansion of participatory budgeting pilot schemes across UK policing authorities.





Building community power

Empowering people and communities is central to co-operative politics – giving people a meaningful say in how their local area operates. This is community power – which provides communities with the rights and powers they need to reshape and reinvigorate their local economies – giving them a meaningful sense of control for the long term.

Building community ownership will be central to delivering long-term community power. Community ownership provides the permanence which will shift power out of Whitehall and to our communities. It has been at the heart of co-operative politics and the co-operative movement since the start.





Growing local community ownership

Community ownership will underpin the longevity of community power. The next Government will need to build up the rights and powers of community groups to purchase assets and land which enable them to reshape their local areas.

The Government should **introduce a Community Right to Buy**, which would give community groups the first right of refusal on the purchase of listed assets of community value. This will need to include former town halls, historic buildings, cinemas, local pubs, music venues, football clubs, land and other assets within communities. This new Community Right to Buy would provide communities with additional time to raise capital needed for the purchase of assets, raising the current 6-month window to 12-months.

The assets of community value (ACVs) listing process could be streamlined, removing barriers to the entrance of new community groups. **The range of assets which can be classed as ACVs should be expanded** - to ensure assets are not negligently lost due to their unavailability for purchase.

Building community ownership will require new funds and capital streams, which provide community groups with the opportunity to purchase a range of different assets of community value. This will require both public and private capital funding, which facilitate the growth of community owned assets.

The **Government could expand and devolve the Community Ownership Fund**, which currently does not provide capital at the scale needed to secure major ACVs. An enhanced version of the Community Ownership Fund will help to unlock larger assets of community value which can form the centrepiece of community-led regeneration projects. **The devolved Community Ownership Fund should form a key part of local authorities' Local Growth Plans** under a future Labour & Co-operative Government.

Dormant assets could be used to provide further capital for community ownership development. There is a case for the **Government reviewing the retention level of capital in the Reclaim Fund and expanding the pipeline of funding from dormant assets.**

The Government could do more to support CDFIs, which provide vital finance to underserved communities, SMEs and community-owned businesses. The Government could unlock additional finance for CDFIs by making the existing Growth Guarantee Scheme permanent.

High streets are particularly in need of community power to help reverse decline and create mixed-use civic spaces. **A new High Street Investment Vehicle could be introduced**, which would move rapidly to secure High Street assets for community groups. This investment vehicle would combine government, commercial and social investment to secure major assets of community value - which command a high price.

Private capital raising is a key part of building community ownership. One of the most effective ways of raising capital is through community share offers, which raise funding by selling shares in the community interest company to members of the community. Since 2012, £200 million pounds has been raised through community share offers - with over 500 community businesses receiving investment, including pubs, shops and renewable energy schemes. **Central and local authorities could work with community groups to raise awareness of community share offers** - raising the profile of this effective fund-raising model. **A successor to the Social Investment Tax Relief (SITR) scheme could be introduced**, including changes to the burden of accessing tax relief and an expansion of eligibility.

The British Business Bank (BBB) could play a larger role in facilitating private capital investment into community owned business. This could include new funding streams which would be specifically for community businesses and groups to aid startup, development and asset purchase for community benefit projects.



Revitalising high streets

The long-term decline on our high streets must be halted and reversed. Greater community ownership will help to shape new civic spaces, which provide mixed use retail, leisure and residential offerings. But expanded community ownership will need to be accompanied by a programme of wider reform, which supports high street businesses and workers.

Business Rates reform

The UK's high street businesses and those who operate in 'bricks and mortar' premises have been consistently disadvantaged by the current business rates system versus online competitors. The current system places a high tax burden on physical retailers and enables online retailers to undercut them.

Our economic system cannot work if there is not a level playing field. The Co-operative Party support the scrapping of business rates and the introduction of a new fairer form of business taxation. This could be accompanied by the introduction of an Online Sales Tax on major online retailers, while the new business taxation system is created which establishes a level playing field between physical and online retailers.

Promoting transparency

Opaque ownership of land and buildings in town centres makes it very difficult for communities to lead local regeneration or reshape their town centre. Greater transparency is required to enable local government and communities to develop plans which can transform town centres. There is a clear case for creating a **publicly available register of property ownership**, based on Land Registry data, together with a wider rollout of a public beneficial ownership register of all property to identify overseas owners.

Community transport

Community ownership can also play a vital role in connecting our communities and delivering transport links – whether that be buses, mini coaches, school transport or dial a ride. In many areas of the country, these initiatives provide a critical lifeline for vulnerable, elderly and isolated people – who rely on them to access goods and services. There is clear need for **the Government to recognise and support community transport provision**, helping to ensure sustainability and longevity for community transport services. Community transport could play an enhanced role in the transport policy devolution packages received by combined and local authorities.

Community involvement in place-making

Communities are integral to place-based policy making - which shapes local economies, town centres and services. Greater community involvement in decision making will help ensure devolution to those closest to the decisions is genuine and profound.

Vital infrastructure services which communities' rely on, such as local bus routes, could be added to existing community asset legislation. This extension could give communities the right to designate bus routes as Community Assets and more say in routes being changed or cut. This change could open up new avenues for community right to run and community right to challenge – if the services are significantly cut or reduced.

The Government and local authorities could support **the development of Community Improvement Districts (CIDs)**, which are a new approach to community-led regeneration. CIDs build on the Business Improvement District model, providing local people, community organisations and businesses with a say in the strategic direction of the local high streets and town centres. The model could be rolled-out across the UK.



Free & fair media

A free and fair press is an integral part of a healthy democracy – guaranteeing citizens have factual information to make decisions and ensuring those in power are held to account.

Greater diversification of ownership within the British media is in the interest of the public - ensuring a greater range of voices, representation and interests within media and press.

Mutual governance of publicly owned television

In order to safeguard the BBC and Channel 4 for the future, the next Labour & Co-operative Government could promote greater accountability and say for viewers. Both the BBC Trust and Channel 4 could adopt a mutual governance model, with members having a greater say in operations and content. This would help improve independence from political interference and remove the threat of privatisation.

Local press

Co-operative models could help to save and revive local and regional news outlets - and both central and local governments could support these co-operative alternatives by providing financial support, guidance, and assistance.

Sport & fan ownership

Fans are the lifeblood of football clubs - yet too often they are disregarded and undervalued by distant owners – leading to rising ticket prices, a lack of accountability and increasing fan alienation.

The recommendations of the Fan-led Review of Football Governance are recognition that the system needs change. **The recommendations of the Fan-led Review of Football Governance should be implemented in full**, including the establishment of a new football regulator with the powers and resources to effect change. The Government should work with the Football

Association, the Scottish Football Association and fan groups to ensure that, where supporters' trusts have been established, they have 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 Government should review how fan-owned models can be established as the preferred ownership mechanism for football clubs whose long-term future is at risk.

Food justice

The cost-of-living crisis and ongoing international conflicts has made food justice and food security more important than ever. There is clear benefit in developing a new National Food Strategy, which would seek to create a healthier, more affordable and more sustainable food system.

The Government should provide greater support to the NHS Healthy Start scheme, which provides healthy food, milk and vitamins to very young children and pregnant women.





Promoting opportunity for all

As a central co-operative principle, education and training has been an important part of the co-operative movement for over a hundred years – helping to provide opportunity through co-operation at all levels of education, from early years and childcare to schools and further education.

The Labour Party have committed to breaking down the barriers to opportunity as one of their 5 key missions for Government. The Co-operative Party support this agenda and believe everyone should have access to good education at all ages – so they can make the most of their lives. Reform is required in both our childcare and schooling systems – delivering accountability, affordability and quality while creating a fairer system for children, parents, carers and workers.





Supporting co-operative early years provision

Every child and family should have access to high quality, affordable childcare across Britain. The co-operative model provides the ideal solution to the challenges faced by the early years sector, putting families, carers and workers in control of childcare provision through a democratic business model. Already across the country, new co-operative childcare providers have emerged – with the ambition of providing greater control over services for families and workers. There is clear need for **co-operative childcare providers to be supported to develop and expand across the UK** – with the ambition of creating a more equitable childcare system.

Growing the co-operative childcare sector

Co-operative childcare settings provide a genuine high-quality alternative to costly providers of early years provision, but the sector needs support from the government to make services more sustainable. Representation made to the Co-operative Party from the co-operative childcare sector revealed the current funding system as inadequate, particularly for providers operating in areas more reliant on state funding – which are often disadvantaged. The inadequate funding has led to co-operative childcare providers operating at a loss or having higher income families cross-subsidise childcare for others, creating an unsustainable situation. The Government will need to address this shortfall by increasing state funding to provide children with high quality childcare in the vital early years of development – where attainment gaps often emerge and become entrenched.

Inequalities in early years could be reduced by bringing forward the introduction of the 30 hours free-childcare allowance from September 2025, including for non-working parents – to ensure the attainment gap between children does not suffer as a result of Government policy. This expansion of the free-childcare allowance will help to ensure children receive greater developmental support and will enable more parents to return to work – helping to

boost economic activity and employment as a direct result. A new Government could consider reviving the Sure Start programme, with consideration for establishing its successor in a mutual model designed to empower families and workers.

Childcare workers

The childcare sector continues to face an ongoing staffing crisis – as low wages and post-Brexit immigration rules reduce the availability of qualified workers. The high turnover rate in the industry harms the ability of childcare providers to deliver the highest quality services, which can hinder development of children at a critical stage. The Government could reduce chronic shortages in the industry by **making international childcare professionals eligible for the Skilled Worker Visa**, which provides workers with the right to work and live in the UK for up to five years.

Primary and secondary schools

A more accountable, democratic school system can be created by establishing the co-operative values and principles within schools.

The last Labour Government took the first steps towards this through the Education Act 2006, which established provision for co-operative schools. This agenda could be renewed under the next Government.

Co-operative models in schooling

The Government could support initiatives which aim to promote co-operative values in education. This would be achieved by ensuring all schools are well-funded and locally accountable. The Government could promote the involvement of co-operative societies in the running of schools and MATs in England. The governance of some MATs has led to issues with fragmentation, commercialisation, lack of accountability and increasing school executive pay. Currently only individual schools are assessed rather than the MAT groups and their sponsors. The next Government ought to ensure **MAT groups**



are subject to full assessment and inspection, so operations, finances and sponsorship management practices can be reviewed. This will ensure negative and damaging practices by MAT groups no longer go unnoticed and unregulated.

For special needs provision, the Government could establish a new national framework for Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCP) and local authority funding dedicated to special education needs (SEN) – ensuring greater consistency of SEN provision across England.

There is clear need for the Government to ensure that the next generation have the skills required for the ‘Fourth Industrial Revolution’, which will transform the economy. There will need to be a greater emphasis on digital and technological skills within schools – including greater access to technology. To compliment this change, there could be greater information available on career paths at an earlier age.

Further education & apprenticeships

Education and training at work is at the heart of the co-operative principles. Co-operative societies across the UK continue to provide excellent opportunities for apprenticeships and skills training, providing people with career paths and life opportunities in a range of different sectors. Achieving parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes is long overdue.

This will mean Government support for best practice on the delivery of apprenticeships and training, such as the Co-op Group’s commitment to delivering apprenticeship opportunities for underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.

There is a clear case for achieving parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes by increasing the number of apprenticeship starts – with a specific **focus on growing entry level apprenticeship starts** - as these are the most accessible to those with low or no qualifications.

The Government could **establish a statutory provision of careers service**. The new services could be delivered by local authorities or career service co-operatives, which would be democratic membership organisations.

Businesses need support to expand the availability of apprenticeships. This can be achieved by **reforming the Apprenticeship Levy**, which is a well-intentioned policy that fails to deliver the flexibility required to significantly expand the availability of new starts. The Government could increase the flexibility in the use of funding. This would help to cover the true costs of training – which would enable the significant expansion of apprenticeship opportunities across the country.

Youth services

Youth services are essential to ensuring the next generation has the environment and support to thrive in life. Youth services help with children’s development and can be very important in ensuring vulnerable children are not put at risk of falling into crime, abuse or anti-social behaviour. The austerity of the last decade has devastated youth services across the country and they will need to be rebuilt for the long term. There is a case for establishing a **statutory duty for youth services in the UK**.

Housing the nation

Restoring the social housing sector and fostering a new generation of housing co-operatives will be crucial in tackling the housing crisis. This will require land-use and planning reform which enables a greater supply of housing to be delivered. Achieving this objective will be critical to improving the availability and affordability of housing.

The UK’s housing sector suffers from a lack of democracy and accountability – which harms the rights and interests of tenants and leaseholders. Greater accountability and democracy ought to be developed in these tenures, through an ambitious reform programme which improves the rights of leaseholders and tenants.



Developing the co-operative housing sector

The Government has a major role to play in developing the co-operative housing sector. It will need to be a funder and facilitator of growth in the sector – unlocking new investment and supporting new developments.

The fundamental action for growth will be **legislating for the creation of co-operative housing tenure**, which will provide legal clarity on the model. Supporting the new legislation with the **development of a financial intermediary**, which would reduce the cost of debt financing for new housing co-operative developments, would enable significant scaling up of development levels.

The Government could create a new national quota for new affordable homes to be delivered as co-operative housing. To achieve this, the Government would need to consider **introducing a National Co-operative Housing Strategy**, which would establish a plan to significantly increase co-operative housing units across the country – utilising a variety of co-operative housing models.

Local Government can support co-operative housing growth by using their pension schemes to invest in new provision. Local authorities could work with their pension providers to ensure patient capital from their schemes can be used to build out new co-operative housing developments, which represent low risk investment opportunities.

From Leasehold to Commonhold

Leasehold is an outdated system which fails to deliver fair housing for leaseholders. All too often leaseholders are trapped by rising service fees and ground rents. The **leasehold tenure should be abolished and converted to commonhold**, which enables leaseholders to come together to own and operate their building. This would end the exploitation prevalent in the leasehold sector and implement a system similar to the condominium system found in North America.

Creating a more democratic housing system

Greater democracy in the housing sector can be fostered by **the introduction of a National Tenant Participation Strategy and creating a National Tenant Voice body**. The Strategy would raise awareness of the benefits of tenant participation and support the development of tenant voice bodies across the country. The National Tenant Voice organisation would be an overarching mutual organisation which would represent the interests of all tenants – whether private or social - to the Government, regulators and other housing bodies. The National Tenant Voice would have an important role in delivering the Strategy and encouraging people to get involved in tenant participation. These tenant voice initiatives could be supported at a local level by local authorities.

The private rental sector needs greater accountability. There is a clear case for the Government **establishing a national private landlord registry in England**, following the example of Scotland. Private landlords would be legally required to sign-up to the register – which would promote transparency in the sector. The register could be publicly available for local councils and members of the public – to ensure rogue landlords are held to account. The Government could introduce **a new framework of minimum standards in the private rental sector**, to ensure all housing provides healthy accommodation for tenants. A right to redress for substandard accommodation would further help to professionalise the sector and reduce exploitation.

Housing associations are now the largest providers of both new and existing social housing. While they have historically operated on a not-for-profit model, they have been increasingly pushed into a more commercially driven model. Housing association governance lacks accountability, which leaves tenants without a voice and with little recourse when things go wrong. To help ensure housing associations operate in the interests of tenants, the Government could encourage their mutualisation to a co-operative model with social tenants as members.



Better energy efficiency & building standards

With the worst rating for energy efficiency in Western Europe, the UK will need to improve its energy efficiency to reduce fuel bills for residents and meet its net zero targets. A new ambitious programme to improve building quality and energy efficiency is required to ensure the UK's housing stock is fit for the future. This will necessitate greater funding, inspection and regulation to ensure all homes meet the requirements required for good living standards.

An improved regulatory regime could ensure Britain's homes meet adequate standards for decent living, strengthening the regulatory guidelines and inspection powers for high rise residential blocks, Homes of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) and office to apartment conversions.

Implementing smaller scale energy efficiency measures will make a big difference to the UK's housing stock. The Government can support this by ensuring councils have the powers and resources available to install solar panels on every new build social home. This could be accompanied by support for the development of local retrofit co-operatives, which could operate on a mutual model to deliver energy efficiency improvements at a local level. The Government could work with Historic England to make it easier to retrofit heritage and listed homes.

Passive House projects deliver ultra-low emissions and energy usage. Local authorities could support Passive House development by fast-tracking planning permission of new developments.

Improving the availability of housing

There is clear need for a new generation of social and co-operative housing being built for communities around the country.

Local councils are already taking action to improve the availability of social housing and these can be supported for the long term by transferring the operation and governance to co-operative management, which promotes tenant participation and accountability.

Under the next Labour & Co-operative Government, there will need to be a **new National Housing First Strategy for homeless people** in our communities. The 'housing first' approach has achieved significant success in Finland and has been piloted in several major UK cities. The Government could roll this approach out across the nation.

The co-operative movement has a rich history of involvement in Garden Cities development, notably Letchworth Garden City. **A new generation of Garden Cities**, utilising the co-operative model, could be an objective for a new Government.

Transforming the planning system

There is clear need for a new model for land use and planning – which rewards the productive use of land for housing, infrastructure or other economic activity. The new system will need to ensure development is more profitable than land banking and that planning reform facilitates building affordable housing.

Community led approaches are an effective way of providing affordable housing which is accountable and democratic. To enable the growth of community led housing, the new Community Right to Buy could be extended to include land which can be developed for community use and social wellbeing – through the delivery of new affordable and community-led housing.

Historically, a major impediment to land assembly and low-cost housing development is the retention of 'Hope Value' introduced through the 1961 Land Compensation Act. Through this piece of legislation, the value of land is inflated by the assumption of planning permission. Whilst reform has been achieved in the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill 2023, more could be done to ensure the new system is decentralised and not on a case-by-case basis. This would enable a greater number of affordable, social and co-operative homes to be built at a faster rate, without bureaucratic hold-up or additional cost.



Community-led housing

The Co-operative Party has been a long-term supporter of community-led housing and Community Land Trusts (CLTs). CLTs are specifically geared towards the delivery of affordable housing, with the CLT not-for-profit organisation owning the land and working with developers to create new affordable housing units, with the CLT remaining the stewards of the homes and assets in perpetuity.

The expansion of the community-led sector could be achieved by increasing the funding for feasibility and technical support for CLT organisations. New public benefit principles for the disposal of public land, could incentivise the release of this land to CLTs and housing co-operatives for the delivery of affordable housing.

The Right to Build was introduced to provide people with the opportunity to build their own home, by putting a duty on local authorities to ensure adequate land provision. **Expanding the Right to Build to CLTs** could be an effective way of facilitating new community-led housing projects. There is a case for CLTs to be exempted from both the Right to Buy and from any future leasehold reform – as this is the primary vehicle used by CLTs to ensure affordability for residents.

Equalities

Too many people across society continue to face marginalisation, unequal opportunities and prejudice. The Co-operative Party is dedicated to building a more equal society – where all receive respect and dignity.

The Co-operative Party believe a progressive and intersectional vision for equality will need to be enacted so our communities no longer face prejudice or discrimination due to their characteristics – whether that is race, religion, sexuality, gender, age, disability, marriage status, national origin, or any other protected characteristic. Creating a fairer, more inclusive society means ensuring all communities have representation and visibility in parliament and politics – with the

opportunity to partake in civic society without barriers or prejudice.

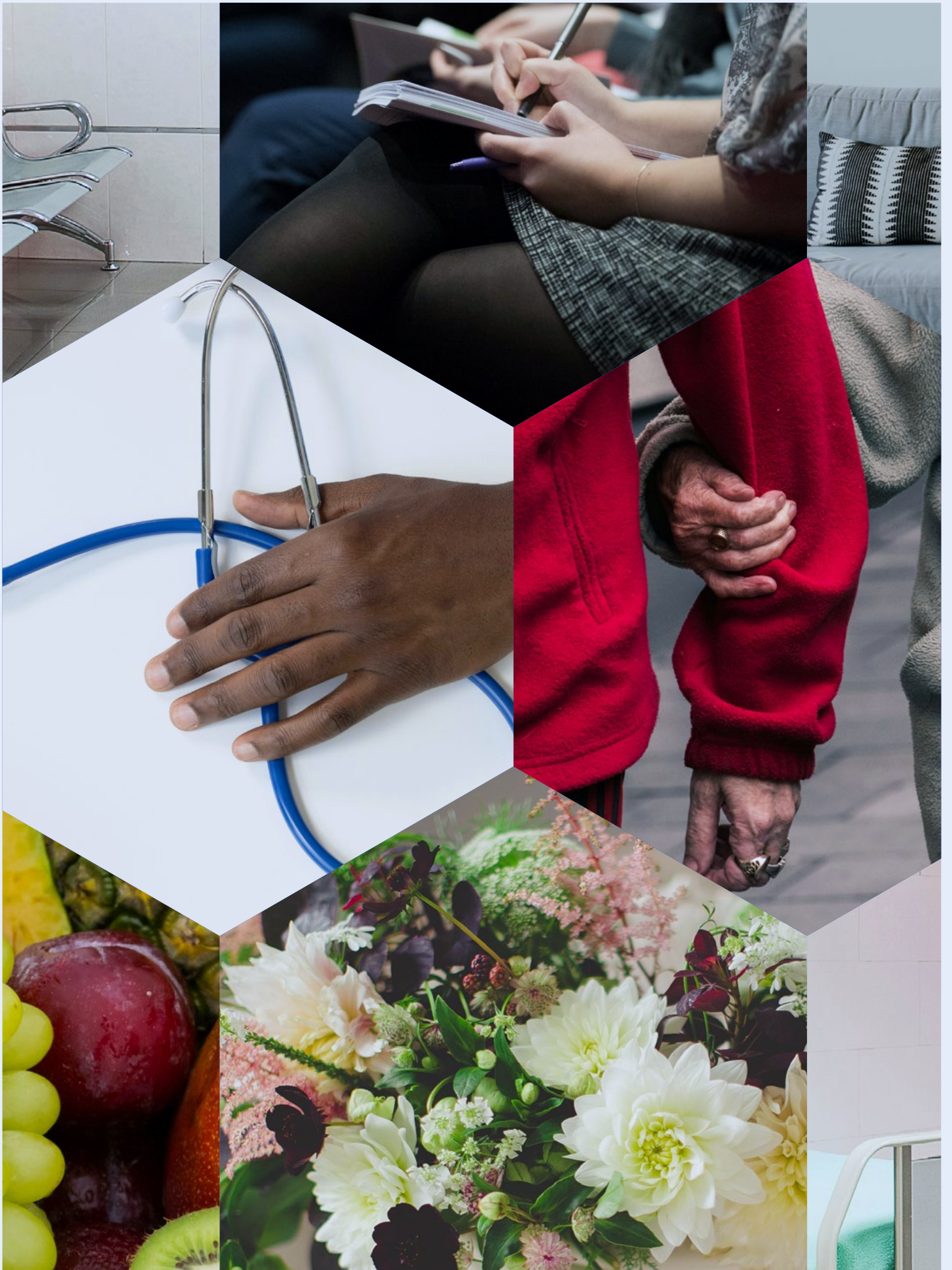
Greater action is required to end homophobia and transphobia. Creating a fairer, more inclusive societies means ensuring LGBTQ+ communities have representation and visibility in parliament and politics; equal and rapid access to health services and appropriate protections against discrimination in the workplace, public services, housing and armed forces. The promotion of LGBTQ+ rights, spaces and venues are important to creating an equitable and inclusive society – with this being needed both at home and abroad.

There is need for action to be taken to end prejudice on faith and religion, including action to end the scourge of Antisemitism and Islamophobia in our society.

It is vital disabled people receive equality in rights and opportunities within our society and action will need to be taken on removing barriers to inclusion wherever they are found, from housing and employment to political representation and public services. In line with our sister party, the Co-operative Party believe in introducing a social definition of disability. There will need to be a greater role for co-production with disabled people in finding solutions to improve public services.

The Co-operative Party and the co-operative movement continue to fight for the advancement of women's rights across society. Co-operative Party representatives have taken action to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls, and support greater women's representation at all levels of politics and society. The Party and co-operative movement will continue to advocate for enhancing and expanding these efforts under a new Government.

Racism, discrimination and xenophobia causes great harm to our society and people. Working alongside our diverse communities, a new Government will need to take steps to tackle racism and discrimination wherever it is found – strengthening the enforcement and protections enshrined in the Equality Act 2010.





Restoring the NHS & social care

The Co-operative Party share Labour's mission of rebuilding an NHS fit for the future - re-establishing a high quality, publicly owned health service which is free at the point of access, as envisaged by the pioneering post-war Labour Government. To reinvigorate this vision, action is required to promote patient voice, build parity of esteem between mental and physical health and deliver a better settlement for NHS staff.





Promoting patient voice

Accountability and the lack of patient voice have been an issue in the healthcare system. There is a clear case for strengthening the patient voice mechanisms within the NHS, so that patient care can be improved using patient feedback. To achieve this, the reorganisation of **Healthwatch groups into co-operative membership organisations** could be considered.

Co-operative solutions to healthcare

Publicly-owned, free at the point of access healthcare remains the guiding light of the NHS. It is integral to the original defining vision which has served the NHS and the British public for over 70 years.

From its inception, the NHS has included healthcare services which have remained outside the publicly owned structure - such as GP practices, dentistry, optometry, and physiotherapy.

In these areas there has been significant concern regarding the availability and accessibility of services. There is a role for co-operative provision in the areas of primary care which have always been outside of the publicly owned NHS structure. There is a clear case for **the Government to support new co-operative models in General Practices (GPs) and dentistry** - helping to create a more democratic and accountable system which raises the voice of care recipient and healthcare workers.

GP co-operatives were commonplace in the past until the reorganisation of NHS out of hours services. To help return this sector to growth, co-operative development capacity could be built, with new support services and advice available to help create new providers and convert existing General Practices to the co-operative model.

Improving mental health services

Mental health services are increasingly stretched as demand grows for these services, with over 4.3 million people being referred to specialist mental health services in 2021. Despite the surging demand, funding has not matched incidence of illness with only 13% of NHS funding going to mental health services despite it making up 28% of the incidence of illness. These statistics demonstrate government needs to do more to achieve parity of esteem between physical and mental health services in funding, commissioning and training.

Delivering preventative care

With an ageing population, it is clear Britain could do more to ensure older generations have a higher quality of life as they age. That is why preventative care will be a central pillar in the NHS' approach to healthcare.

There is a clear case for introducing a **new National Food Strategy** which improves public health, reduces obesity and delivers food justice. Achieving food security and ending hunger through a National Food Strategy will help to improve people's mental health, deliver a healthy start for children and increase overall wellbeing for all.



Social care

Private equity firms have become increasingly involved in the social care market, creating an extractive model which fails to deliver for care recipients, their families or workers. A different approach is possible - by building social care services on the co-operative model.

New social care co-operatives

New social care co-operatives should be promoted to create a more equitable, accountable and democratic social care system - which puts care recipients and workers in the driving seat. This has already been happening in areas across the country, where social care co-operatives are delivering social care services that empower the care provider and the care recipient.

The new social care co-ops could be supported by a new duty to promote co-operative social care provision - as was introduced in Wales as part of the 2014 Social Services and Well-being Act passed by the Senedd.

Where private social care providers face financial difficulties, they are often sold to another provider or close down. Under these circumstances, there could be a 'right to own' so the service they work for can become an employee-owned enterprise or worker co-operative.

Not-for-profit social care providers should be asset locked to ensure their assets or surpluses cannot be purchased by private investors or providers wishing to pursue a for profit model. This will help reduce profit leakage, which has been a significant issue within the sector over recent years.

Social care integration

A key part of reforming the social care sector will be increasing the integration between healthcare and social care. Strong leadership within NHS services is required to ensure people can have care built around them - meeting physical and mental care needs. This vision can only occur under local systems that truly integrate the different sectors of the system.

Bereavement & Funeral Care

Bereavement is a very difficult time for individuals and families - but support is often lacking or absent entirely. This can lead to the emergence of trauma, mental health issues and loneliness for the bereaved. No one should have to go through a bereavement without support and more is needed in terms of care and support for bereaved people.

The UK Bereavement Commission provides a path towards a better system of bereavement support and funeral care. The Commission's report aims to ensure there is appropriate care and support available for all those who have been bereaved - preventing financial issues and wellbeing problems occurring in those affected. The Commission recommends the Government ensure all people have access to affordable and meaningful funeral care services, which honour the memory of loved ones. There is a clear case for the complete adoption of the recommendations of the UK Bereavement Commission - setting a path for a more compassionate bereavement support and funeral care system.





Devolving power

The Commission on the UK's Future led by former Prime Minister Gordon Brown has laid the groundwork for greater devolution and constitutional change, to create a fairer, more prosperous and more united Britain. The Commission demonstrated the clear need for greater devolution to reduce inequality, improve economic dynamism and provide greater opportunities for people across the UK. The devolution agenda can once again be a defining mission in sharing power and wealth across the country.





Deepening devolution

The recommendations of the Commission on the UK's Future could form the basis for constitutional reform.

Devolution beyond local authority level is both possible and preferable. A new political settlement which achieves this could be decisive in shifting power from Whitehall to communities across the country - helping them to reshape and redefine areas. It could be transformative in providing people with greater control over their lives - restoring a sense of power and trust in the democratic system which has been lacking over the last decade. A Constitutional Convention could review and explore the opportunities to achieve this transformative change.

Devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

While the devolution settlements established under the last Labour Government provided a comprehensive constitutional reform, which gave significant powers to new national assemblies, more can be done to strengthen the powers of the Welsh Senedd, Scottish Parliament and Northern Irish Assembly. The constitutional convention could assess what further levers and powers can be transferred to the devolved national governments.

Local government

Local Government is a vital part of civic society – delivering the day-to-day public services people rely on. There is a fundamental role for local government in improving the lives of citizens across the nation.

After years of real terms funding cuts and austerity, local government has been left in a perilous position by the Conservative Government. Improving the lives of residents will mean local government will need to receive the funding it requires to deliver the high-quality services it is expected to deliver for local residents. Implementing longer-term funding

settlements will help local councils plan for the future and make strategic investments in important infrastructure. A new government could review and address how the powers of local government can be strengthened through devolution, including new initiatives in 'Total Place' – which would seek to create more efficient, higher quality public services by taking a whole area approach to service design and delivery. New Total Place schemes could be piloted in local authorities – with the ambition for further roll out upon successful results. The case for greater fiscal devolution could be reviewed and new schemes piloted – with the ambition of decentralising power and giving regional authorities greater control over local revenue raising and investment. This would need to be revenue neutral and structured in a way which prevents tax competition between local authorities.

Strengthening our democracy

A new devolution settlement can only work if our democratic institutions are strong. The Government can play an important role in reducing barriers to participation in Britain's democracy, enabling people to take a more active role in civic life and decision making. People need to feel their vote counts and that voting matters - to help deliver positive changes to people's lives.

Reducing barriers to democratic participation

The recent years has seen the introduction of a number of bureaucratic requirements for voting. The new rules impact many people's ability to vote - including people without ID documents. This can prevent people from having a say in decision making, alienating them from the democratic process. The registration process for voting should be easier and faster so people are not prevented from voting due to bureaucratic processes.

As part of the constitutional convention, a new Government could review how electoral reforms can strengthen the changes enacted. The review could



look at how democratic systems and institutions can be modernised - by harnessing technology more effectively to give people a greater say.

The electoral reform review could assess online voting, elections on weekends, 24 hour polling stations, automatic voter registration, political education in schools and abstention options on the ballot paper. This would enable greater engagement in the democratic process for younger generations which are 'tech native'.

Future generations & youth democracy

With ever widening intergenerational inequality, urgent action is required to ensure young people are well represented and their issues taken seriously by government. Promoting youth democracy will help give young people greater opportunity to engage in civic life and decision making. Providing voting rights for those 16 years old and up would enable young people to engage more fully in democratic processes. Expanding the network of Youth Councils could be a further way of promoting youth democracy.

The introduction of a UK-wide **Well-being of Future Generations Act** could be considered to ensure decision making takes account of young people and future generations to come.





Britain in the world

The Co-operative Party is proudly an internationalist party – supporting co-operation between nations to confront our biggest challenges in partnership and collaboration. Society’s largest challenges are international in scope – climate change, global peace, building a fairer economy and ending poverty.





International response to climate change

The UK can be a leader in action to reduce climate change and move the global community towards net zero emissions. The Government should encourage ongoing multilateral agreements on climate action, through global meetings such as the UN's Congress of the Parties (COP) on climate change. There is clear need for the UK Government to continue to **seek binding resolutions which expand multilateral climate action and accelerate decarbonisation globally.**

The UK can play a pivotal role in climate change mitigation internationally through its trade and international development policies – incorporating agreements that promote decarbonisation and net zero. Greater assessments of the climate impact of all international development programmes could be introduced to facilitate decarbonisation in aid recipient countries.

Supporting community energy development in the Global South will be an important tool in decarbonising economies and reducing the impact of climate change on developing countries. The Government could look to expand the **community energy sector in the Global South by establishing growth of the sector as a mission for International Climate Finance (ICF)** – a cross-department funding programme.

Human rights and international modern slavery

Britain should return to being a strong advocate for universal human rights – working with organisations including the UN, EU, UNICEF, Amnesty International and others to raise awareness and put a stop to human rights violations.

The UK will also need to ensure its unilateral action enshrines respect for human rights. New trade agreements with international partner countries can be a way of promoting and defending human rights.

The UK has a leading role to play in ending the scourge of modern slavery internationally. Across the globe, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates there to be 49.6 million victims of modern slavery. The Government can commit to action against modern slavery through its international relations, international trade and international development policies.

International development

With many challenges confronting the planet requiring significant leadership and multilateral action, the UK cannot afford to take a step back in international development. There should be a clear focus on returning the UK to its status as a global leader in international development – which puts sustainability, the promotion of democracy and poverty reduction at its heart.

Re-establishing the Department for International Development (DFID)

The success of DFID made the UK a world-leader in international development policy. There is a clear basis for the Government to **re-establish an independent international development department with policy autonomy and the resources - aiming to return to the 0.7% spending target** recommended by the UN.

Supporting international co-operatives

Co-operatives provide good jobs, economic empowerment and economic development throughout the Global South and **the UK's international development policy should support the expansion of the co-operative sector.**

This should be achieved by supporting inclusive finance initiatives, including the expansion of the credit union sector in the Global South. Co-operatives can be a powerful tool for socio-economic inclusion and empowerment, particularly for marginalised groups. The Government should support developing the freedom and economic



status of women through the promotion of women's co-operatives – such as those seen in Rwanda. This can be delivered through DFID programmes such as the SheTrades Commonwealth Programme.

Promoting global Fair Trade

The global co-operative movement has been a long-term supporter of fair trade. The Government can support fair trade partnerships across the Global South by encouraging their uptake as part of new trade deals. Domestically, the Government should encourage retailers and other companies to support and source from fair trade producers.

Trade justice & debt relief

As the UK develops international trade deals post-Brexit, it must promote trade justice globally – ensuring benefits of trade are felt by workers and producers across the globe. To achieve this, trade deals can remove distorting subsidies and tariffs which disadvantage producers in less developed economies. Working towards Goal 17 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the UK could 'assist developing countries in attaining debt sustainability' through a programme of debt relief which works towards poverty reduction.

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