

THE



**co-operative
party**

Members' Magazine Spring/Summer 2023

PIONEER

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Jonathan Reynolds MP
on unleashing co-operative
sector growth

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Case studies:
Growing employee
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Angela Rayner MP:
Public money as a
force for good



'working with the Co-operative Party, we've committed to doubling the size of the co-operative sector'

See Angela Rayner MP's 'A Force for Good', page 10



Letter from the Chair of the Co-operative Party



Welcome to the latest edition of The Pioneer, your Co-operative Party member magazine.

Friends, welcome to the new edition of The Pioneer, "Unleashing Co-operation".

Thank you for your support for our Party. It's an important time in the political cycle and I am privileged to be your Chair. Together we are hugely ambitious for our Party and ambitious for the movement we represent. It is more important than ever we are a strong co-operative voice in politics—informing policy, campaigning and advocating for our values and principles. In order to build the more fair, green and resilient society and economy we need, we know the co-operative sector requires significant growth. That is what this edition is focused on.

This edition also covers the wide range of activity happening within the Party including our work ahead of the upcoming local elections. I am looking forward to supporting the hundreds of Party members as they stand for election. We need as many co-operators at decision making tables as possible and add to the 1300 Co-operative Councillors.

We have much to do and I am looking forward to it. ●

Jim McMahon MP,
Chair of the Co-operative Party

THE PIONEER

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AN ALTERNATIVE FUTURE



Jonathan Reynolds MP
Shadow Business and Industrial Strategy Secretary
Labour & Co-operative MP for Stalybridge and Hyde

The first Co-operative Party Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Industrial Strategy, Jonathan Reynolds MP, outlines his plan to unleash co-operative sector growth.

We in the co-operative movement know what a force for good our sector can be in addressing the challenges our economy faces, from rising inequality to falling productivity. That's why I am immensely proud to be the first Co-operative Party Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Industrial Strategy.

I'm ambitious for our sector, and I'm proud that it's an ambition our sister party shares. The Labour Party has previously committed to work with

our movement to double the size of the co-operative sector, and I'm keen to see this supported again. Of course, my aim is to become the first Co-operative Party Business Secretary and the most co-operatively minded holder ever of that post.

In my view, a problem with British economic policy is that it's always searching for a magic bullet: the super-deduction capital allowance, miracle tax cuts, leaving the Single Market. It just doesn't work like that. What it requires is a long-term industrial strategy – which we have launched. It needs more, not less, ambition on net zero. It means fixing the flaws in the Brexit deal. It will take big boosts to R&D investment, reform of business rates, and the minimum wage becoming a real living wage.

I believe another key element is the incentivisation of diverse ownership structures, and a look at corporate governance and taxation to incentivise long term prosperity over shorter-term concerns. The nature of UK capitalism, and ownership of a lot of public companies, has changed a lot in recent years. In itself, it's a fascinating subject. But a vibrant co-operative sector is clearly a major part of how we make this change to long-term success. It is why we have specifically referred to co-operatives within Labour's Industrial Strategy.

To me, it is surprising that despite governance and regulation of other business forms falling within the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, responsibility for co-operatives lies with the Treasury. In some ways it's no wonder that too often the needs and interests of our movement fall between the cracks of government departmental responsibility. We must ensure that the machinery of government is right for co-operative growth.

In doing so, we can begin to level the playing field for our movement, ensuring full consideration is given to the needs of co-operatives and the conditions they need to thrive. And as a Co-operative Secretary of State for Business and Industrial Strategy in a Labour government, under my responsibility I would help ensure our movement has everything it needs to fulfil its growth potential, and continue delivering in the interests of workers, consumers, local communities, the environment and our economy. ●

CO-OPERATION IN ACTION



**Joe Escalante Coney
& Alex Lloyd Hunter**
Forward Action Co-Founders

Forward Action is a digital mobilisation agency, founded in 2015. Our team of 20 work with non-profit organisations to fundraise and campaign for progressive change.

In preparation for our exit in mid-2023, we moved the company to employee ownership in November 2022. We saw it as the best foundation for Forward Action to continue thriving long term as an impactful, happy, and fulfilling place to work.

At its core, our journey to employee ownership has been about empowering employees (now co-owners) with responsibility and influence over the effective operation of the company and setting up a good governance structure to preserve our culture and progressive mission.

We've been blown away by what we've seen so far: co-owners have taken onboard the message that they now own the business. We've been able to bring them in to making tough decisions and trade-offs, and they're acting on their own initiative to make widespread improvements to how we work. It's also helped us attract a high quality field of candidates to replace us as CEO.

We'd highly recommend the model as a way for business owners to exit whilst setting up their organisations to flourish without them. ●

Empowering employees protects and promotes business, as Forward Action and Melin Tregwynt have found in their recent transitions to employee ownership.



Rhodri Packman
Cwmpas

Melin Tregwynt, Pembrokeshire's iconic woollen mill and shop, has become employee owned after current owners, Eifion and Amanda Griffiths, handed the reins to the company's 42 employees.

Melin Tregwynt was supported in its transition by Social Business Wales, which is delivered by Cwmpas.

The mill was founded by Eifion's grandfather in 1912 and has since developed into a thriving company weaving woollen blankets, fabrics, and much more.

Alongside its own stock ranges, the company has worked with John Lewis, Liberty, Muji, and the BBC, who have all commissioned exclusive ranges.

In April 2022, the business formally handed over the ownership of the business via an employee ownership trust, which will preserve the traditional skills and knowledge gathered over more than a century.

Explaining the reasons for the transition, Eifion said:

“It was important for us that Melin Tregwynt remained a viable business and part of its local community, and employee ownership provided the perfect solution for us.

“We will guide the new management board through the transition, but most importantly the 42 strong workforce will keep their jobs, and skills and knowledge will remain here and be kept alive.” ●



Above: Melin Tregwynt's Employee Ownership Trust (EOT).



Left: A Forward Action Co-owner employee ownership certificate.

UNLEASHING CO-OPERATION



Tulip Siddiq MP

Shadow Economic Secretary to the Treasury
Labour MP for Hampstead and Kilburn

Co-operative financial services need their own rulebook to support members and encourage growth, as the Shadow Economic Secretary to the Treasury explains.

The British co-operative movement has a long and proud tradition of supporting working people to access affordable finance. The sector continues to play an invaluable role in promoting financial responsibility and resilience among their members.

But under the Conservatives, the sector has been held back. This is because credit unions, building societies and co-operative banks are working within an outdated regulatory regime – leaving them unable to compete on a level playing field with standard providers.

The Financial Services and Markets Bill was an opportunity for the Government to unleash the full potential of co-operative finance.

Outside of the EU, the UK has greater freedom to shape the rules governing co-operatively run

financial services and to give the sector the flexibility it needs to grow.

Instead, while the Bill did contain some long overdue provisions such as enabling credit unions to offer a wider range of products, the Conservatives failed to offer an ambitious vision for the sector.

As Shadow City Minister, I worked with the Co-operative Party to table amendments to the Bill which would require the regulators – the FCA and PRA – to report on how they have considered mutual and co-operative business models.

The FCA's most recent annual report includes not one mention of the needs of co-operatives, mutuals, building societies or credit unions. While in the latest PRA annual report building societies are

just lumped in with standard banks.

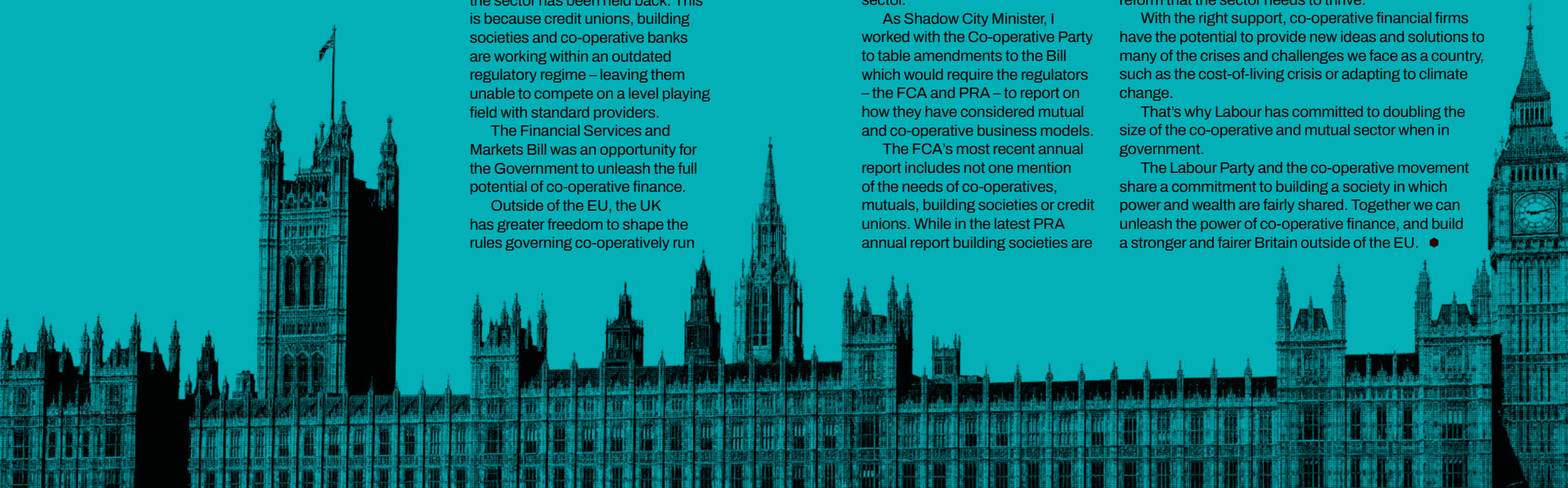
Every single co-operative and mutual business leader I have spoken to – from Nationwide to the firms represented by the BSA – has called for the regulators to report separately on the specific needs of their sector.

Despite this, the Conservatives chose to vote down our proposals. While my Labour colleagues will attempt to amend the Bill in the House of Lords, it's clear that this Conservative Government will not provide the regulatory reform that the sector needs to thrive.

With the right support, co-operative financial firms have the potential to provide new ideas and solutions to many of the crises and challenges we face as a country, such as the cost-of-living crisis or adapting to climate change.

That's why Labour has committed to doubling the size of the co-operative and mutual sector when in government.

The Labour Party and the co-operative movement share a commitment to building a society in which power and wealth are fairly shared. Together we can unleash the power of co-operative finance, and build a stronger and fairer Britain outside of the EU. ●



A FORCE FOR GOOD

Deputy Labour Leader **Angela Rayner MP** explains how we can unleash the power of co-operatives through a fairer, more transparent procurement process.



“I’ll continue to make the case for a different way of doing things; a way that puts the public first, makes Britain work for working people, and sees investment in our communities, with every penny of public money spent for the good of this endeavour.”



Angela Rayner MP
Deputy Leader of the Labour Party

When considering the major challenges we face as a country and the solutions we must offer to them, public procurement might not be the first thought that comes to peoples’ minds.

But the truth of the matter is that how and where we spend public money can have a huge impact on our communities and on people’s lives.

In fact, a third of all government spending goes on procurement. That’s more than the NHS and double the education budget. The difference this can make is huge.

This money, if spent wisely, can support British business and enterprise, pump skills and resources into our communities and town centres, and support the return of local jobs. It’s vital for Britain’s future that we get this right.

That’s why at the last Labour Party Conference, I set out our plan to spend every penny of public money for the good of the nation, ensuring that Britain works for working people, and properly investing in our local communities.

The Government have fallen far short of this standard. Procurement has been used to serve vested interests, not the national interest.

Their Procurement Bill is a stark example of this where we see a charter for cronies which looks to entrench the damage already done by the VIP lanes for PPE contracts, or money handed over to companies with links to tax havens.

The legislation could legalise these dodgy practices, and we risk seeing an increase on the incredible £3.7bn of taxpayers’ money that has already gone to friends and donors of the Conservative Party since the start of the pandemic.

That isn’t good enough. It’s why working, alongside the Co-operative Party, I’m seeking to ensure we properly unleash the power of procurement to support the public, get the best value for money, and drive-up standards.

To do this, we’ve pushed to strengthen the Bill in a number of ways.

We are forcing votes to legally embed social value in the Government’s procurement spending, ensuring standards on issues such promoting the public good, workers conditions and rights, tax transparency, non-discrimination, integrity, environmental standards, and local investment are met. It’s not good enough that your taxpayer money can end up too often being stashed away by multi-national corporations based in tax havens, or benefiting companies that underpay or mistreat their staff.

Of course, the co-operative movement knows that co-operatives are at the forefront of these efforts to offer an alternative, ethical approach to business that is rooted in community and the common good.

When it comes to entrenching social value in our economy, this isn’t something co-operatives merely strive towards: it’s fundamental to their very nature.

The benefits co-operatives can bring is why we’ve also sought to amend the Procurement Bill to do more to support the growth of the sector, by pushing the Government to do more in breaking down barriers to co-operative inclusion in

procurement awards, and make sure that at the very least co-operative businesses are considered on level terms alongside other business forms by contracting authorities.

The contribution of the co-operative sector is integral to Labour’s plan for the future of our country – it’s why, working with the Co-operative Party, we’ve committed to doubling the size of the co-operative sector.

As we continue working towards that plan of a fairer, greener economy, procurement spending is a critical aspect of how we will get there. Within this, I’ll continue to make the case for a different way of doing things; a way that puts the public first, makes Britain work for working people, and sees investment in our communities, with every penny of public money spent for the good of this endeavour. ●



MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MEMBERSHIP

The Co-operative Party's membership stands at a record high, with more people joining our Party than ever before. Whether you're new to our movement or a longstanding co-operator, we want you to make the most of your membership. Here's a guide to getting started.



SIR MARK HENDRICK MP

Sir Mark Hendrick is the Labour and Co-operative MP for Preston.



What do you hope to achieve with the Co-operatives, Mutuels and Friendly Societies Bill?

I hope it forms the basis for a longer-term programme which protects co-operatives and mutuels so that they can form a more prominent place in the UK economy than they currently have. I hope it begins to reverse the decades of disadvantage faced by co-ops and mutuels compared to other forms of business in terms of raising capital and securing investment, and protects assets of co-ops built up over decades from the ambitions of corporate raiders and asset strippers.

What's the inspiration?

There's no single inspiration, but over the 40 years of being a co-operator, I've seen building societies demutualised in the 80s, an attempted hostile takeover of the CWS/CRS (nowadays Co-op Group) in the late 90s, and more recently the attempted demutualisation of LV=, a mutual originally set up to help poor families in Liverpool pay for funerals. Legislation needs to change to make it harder for the raiders and asset strippers; and to protect assets which have been built up over many years and decades.

How's it going?

The Bill reaches 3rd Reading and Report stage on 24 February and assuming everything goes smoothly will enter the Lords and hopefully will become law before the end of the summer.

Originally the Government was quite sceptical about the draft Bill, but I think the proposal to demutualise LV= was one that they were keen to avoid repeating, and they've come round to the value of an asset lock. Now the nature of Private Members Bills is not only do you end up having to compromise on some of your ambitions to achieve cross-party support, but in doing so you find unlikely allies. There's a strand of Conservative thinking which supports social businesses, seeing co-operatives and mutuels as enabling people and communities to help themselves through tough times, rather than resorting to the welfare state.

You've got a background in electronic engineering which is relatively rare in Parliament. Do you think that being an engineer helps you approach challenges differently?

Engineering is about outcomes, about making things work. We look at the inputs to a process and we have to try and engineer the outcomes we want from them. I suppose it is possible to see Parliament as a machine with some of the inputs being co-operative priorities working hand in hand with Labour values, and the Co-operatives, Mutuels and Friendly Societies Bill being a desirable output. What happens in between is parliamentary processing. ●

“it is possible to see Parliament as a machine with some of the inputs being co-operative priorities working hand in hand with Labour values, and the Co-operatives, Mutuels and Friendly Societies Bill being a desirable output.”

HELENA DOLLIMORE

Helena Dollimore is the Labour and Co-operative Parliamentary Candidate for Hastings and Rye.



Why did you choose to put yourself forward to be a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the next General Election?

We've got to get a Labour and Co-operative Government at the next election. Thirteen years of Conservative rule has decimated our public services and stifled our economy. Most of my childhood was under the

last Labour Government and so our schools, NHS and public services were thriving. When the Tories first came to power in 2010, I was just embarking on my A Levels at a local state school. The cuts made then to our school back then meant teachers were made redundant and I was asked to teach myself the rest of my Chemistry A Level. That was over a decade ago, and since then things have

got so much worse. Young people growing up today simply do not have the chances I did. In Hastings and Rye, half of teenagers leave school without a C in Maths and English at GCSE. We know the solution is a Labour government, and so I decided to get stuck in and help make it happen.

What does it mean to you to be a Co-operative candidate?

It's really important to me to be a Labour and Co-operative candidate. From a young age I helped out in the Traidcraft shop that my late grandmother Liz set up.

In Hastings and Rye we have a huge number of co-operatives, from our community library in Ore to our 1066 Community Bank with more in the works. With the challenges we face from energy bills closing Rye Leisure Centre to unaccountable water companies dumping sewage in our sea, co-operative values are becoming even more relevant in empowering our community to protect what is important to us.

What issues matter to you locally, and how are you seeking to apply co-operative solutions?

Locally we have seen a huge issue with energy bill costs closing our swimming pool in Rye. Leisure centres haven't had the help they need from central government to deal with this crisis of rising bills. The community are looking at an alternative model that could bring the pool back into community use, and a co-operative solution would be great.

As the PPC for a coastal constituency, you've been active in opposing sewage dumping. What's caused this crisis?

Time and time again, we get sewage dumped in our sea. People have ended up in hospital from swimming in the sea, and the impact on local businesses and tourism is huge. And it's only because of the work of campaigners that this scandal has even been exposed and we now know when a dumping happens. What is needed is for the Government to get much tougher on the water companies polluting our seas. Our own Co-operative Party Chair Jim McMahon MP, as the Shadow Cabinet lead for this area, has set out how we would ban 90% of discharges by 2030, legislate for monitors on every pipe and hold water bosses accountable. But to do any of that, we need a Labour government. That starts with winning in Hastings and Rye and I'd invite any Co-op members to join us on the campaign trail. Just get in touch! ●

NORTHERN IRELAND: SOLVING STUDENT HOUSING



Ellen Fearon
Belfast Student Housing Co-op

“A housing co-op in Belfast would give students the option of much lower rent and a property they could manage and maintain themselves”

Students have been facing huge issues with housing for years including poor standards, accessibility, and an increasing level of unaffordability. We definitely noticed this more acutely in the last few years and students are being squeezed more than ever. The lowest rent outside of the private rented sector for students in Belfast amounts to £4,522 for a 38 week lease. Students who are not means tested receive a maximum loan of £4,840 for the entire year meaning that 93% of their maximum loan goes directly to rental costs before we factor in all of life's other costs. There's a huge gap here that is not being addressed.

We aim to set up Northern Ireland's first student housing co-op as part of an overall response to this crisis. We're a group of current and past students and Students' Union officers who wanted to take action when it's clear no-one else will. A housing co-op in Belfast would give students the option of much lower rent and a property they could manage and maintain themselves as students so that we're no longer acting as cash-cows for landlords. We're excited to grow and can already feel the buzz that a real alternative for students would generate! ●

SCOTLAND: SECURING THE FUTURE FOR ALL



Sarah Boyack MSP
Labour & Co-operative MSP
for Lothian (Region)

The challenges we face in securing a planet able to support future generations are being undermined by the short termism that is endemic in our politics today. The only way to avert the climate crisis and build a sustainable country that prioritises community wellbeing is by working together and co-operating on these profound and complex issues.

My proposed Members Bill entitled: Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill, would end this short-termism, ensuring that public bodies across Scotland work together so that decisions they make meet the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.

This Bill would provide clarity on the definitions of sustainable development and wellbeing; place new duties on public bodies; and crucially create a new Commissioner who would ensure public bodies meet these duties. One of the issues I'd be keen to explore is how we could raise the profile of co-operative ownership and organisations in relation to procurement contracts. The wider benefits of co-operative working need to be highlighted in terms of wellbeing of workers and the wider community benefits they deliver. ●

“The wider benefits of co-operative working need to be highlighted in terms of wellbeing of workers and the wider community benefits they deliver.”

The Bill is currently out for consultation until 24th March 2023. You can find out more at www.sarahboyack.com.

SHARING POWER AND WEALTH IN WALES



Vaughan Gething MS

Minister for Economy, and Welsh Labour and Co-operative Party MS for Cardiff South and Penarth

“In recent years we have returned Welsh rail to public ownership, abolished the Right to Buy, extended Free School Meal support and protected funding for credit unions.”

The Co-operative Party's driving mission is one that Welsh Labour in Government is dedicated to making a reality.

That mission to build a society where power and wealth are shared runs through everything we do. In recent years we have returned Welsh rail to public ownership, abolished the Right to Buy, extended Free School Meal support and protected funding for credit unions.

Building a stronger, fairer, greener economy means going much further. In this term of Government we are taking far reaching action across the board. The Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS recently announced our exciting plans to establish a publicly owned energy company for Wales with a target of at least 1.5 GigaWatt of renewable energy capacity to be locally owned by 2035.

As Economy Minister with responsibility for the Co-operative Economy, I am working with Monmouthshire Building Society to develop a Community Bank for Wales, ensuring that a mutual model brings retail services back to our high streets as well as supporting the expansion of employee ownership in Wales. We are committed to doubling the number of employee owned businesses but our ambition will not stop there. As more businesses take this opportunity seriously, we have a unique opportunity to grow a model that has sustainability and co-operation built into its DNA. This progress is made possible by a committed, innovative co-operative movement and Welsh Labour in power – it's a partnership we should all be proud of. ●

Diverse Councils Declaration



Baroness Debbie Wilcox of Newport

Labour and Co-operative Member of the House of Lords

Two of the key co-operative values are equality and democracy. I have been working with Co-operative Party colleagues on a project to bring the success of the Welsh LGA to develop a charter for councils in England aimed at increasing diversity in local government.

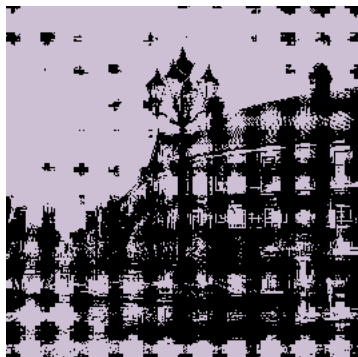
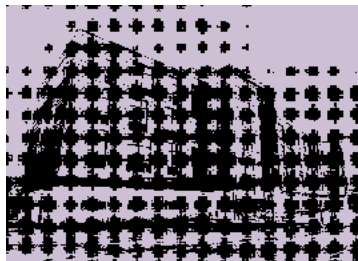
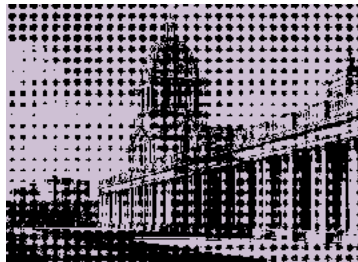
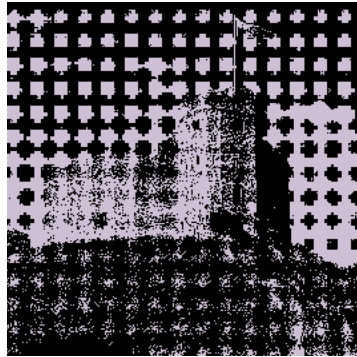
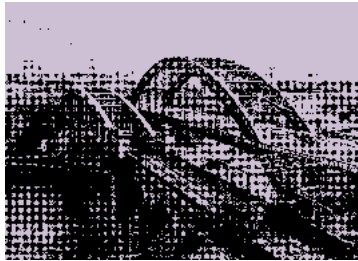
Councillors represent their community, so we want to ensure Councillors reflect the diversity of their community, particularly those with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation).

Our consultation revealed that whilst 96.2% of respondents felt that it is important for good decision making that our council reflects the diversity of our residents, less than half felt that their own authority was achieving this well enough. There is a clear appetite for change. Recent figures show that 96% describe themselves as white, 88% as heterosexual or straight, 16% have a disability or long term condition, 36% have caring responsibilities and only 36% are female.

I am proud to announce our new Diverse Councils Declaration. We have already had a number of councillors eager to take up the challenge, removing

barriers standing in the way of a more diverse and inclusive democracy. ●

“Councillors represent their community, so we want to ensure Councillors reflect the diversity of their community”



Photographs of the locations of our ongoing in-person regional and national conferences. See if you can spot your local one!



Daniel Monaghan
Policy Officer
Co-operative Party

With the Conservative Government lurching from crisis to crisis, it's clearly time for a Labour and Co-operative government. Opinion polls indicate this is a view widely shared by the public – who are looking for hope with a new Labour and Co-operative government after 13 years of failure.

When the next general election comes, the Co-operative Party must have a vision for a brighter future. We need to put across a policy platform which puts co-operative values and principles at the heart of our economy and society. To do this, we will present our vision early, so we can make the case for a co-operative society in advance of the general election.

In 2023, we will be developing our next general election manifesto, with the launch scheduled for our Annual Conference. We will be engaging our members throughout the year, including at each of the regional

and devolved nations' conferences, where we will be holding workshops which provide members with the chance to discuss their priorities for a future Labour and Co-operative government. We hope to see you at one of our regional and devolved nations' conferences, so we can hear your thoughts on how we can create a more co-operative Britain! ●



Making the most of your membership

EQUALITIES: BUILDING CO-OPERATION AT UNIVERSITY



Stephen Andrews
Co-operative Party Rep
Keele Labour Students

I was shocked to find out that we, at Keele, were the first Labour Students' group to have the role of 'Co-operative Party Rep', but I have been really proud of that achievement and want to set the foundation for other societies to do so.

Thinking about how the Co-operative Party resonates with me, I recall a particular recent campaign: the #NotPartOfTheJob campaign that we ran alongside USDAW. Many students will find themselves getting a job while they're studying, and these often fall within the hospitality and retail sectors; this is true for myself as I worked in bars since I was able to work! Unfortunately, many of us have received abuse in the past, and this has had a serious effect on our mental health and personal wellbeing. It isn't right for anyone to receive any form of abuse at work, but this can add to the pressure of higher education for many of my peers. I am so pleased that the Co-operative Party took this on and led the way on the campaign.

My goal as Co-operative Party Rep is to attract more young people into the co-operative movement and educate them about the benefits of co-operative politics. ●

To opt-in to any of the Networks, please visit party.coop/equalities

EVENTS: WHAT'S ON

The Co-operative Party has organised an extensive programme of online and in-person events taking place throughout 2023.

Candidate Development Programme

Our Candidate Development Programme delivers regular training and networking opportunities for local government candidates. Details of upcoming sessions can be found at party.coop/local/candidate/latest.

Regional Conferences

Regional Conferences for 2023 are taking place in person for the first time since before the pandemic. So far the feedback from members has been extremely positive at this opportunity to get together, hear from speakers and engage in ideas for a future manifesto.

Local Government Conference

Our Local Government Conference is taking place on Saturday 17 June in Manchester – these events provide fantastic opportunities for networking and sharing best practice.

Co-operation Live

Co-operation Live events began in pandemic providing opportunities for members to get together and hear from experts, politicians and practitioners on a wide range of topics throughout the year.

New Member Training

Our new member training takes place at several points throughout the year allowing new members to hear more about how to make the most of their membership, what it's like to be an officer, hear more about standing for election and learning more about the co-operative movement.



Save 10% on the Fairphone 4 and Superfast Fibre Broadband

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4.4/5
Feefo
score

★★★★★
"Such a distinct product. Excellent smartphone that is ethical and sustainable."
Andrew, 13/01/23 on Feefo



★★★★★
"Very knowledgeable and helpful staff. Good product, good price, happy to recommend."
John, 09/01/23 on Feefo

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