



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

EXECUTIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Online – Zoom meeting

Meeting 1000 – 1200 hours on Tuesday 5th March 2024

MINUTES

Present:

Cllr Louise Gittins	Cheshire West & Chester Council (Chair)
Cllr Paul Cassidy	Inverclyde Council
Cllr Barbara Brownridge	Oldham Council (Accountable Body)
Cllr Cathy Scott	Kirklees Council
Cllr Graeme Miller	Sunderland City Council
Cllr Sue Smith	Rochdale Borough Council
Cllr Peter Bradbury	Cardiff Council (Vice Chair)
Cllr Clare Gamble	Billingham Town Council (Associate Rep)
Jonathan Bland	SBI/E3M (Affiliate Rep)
Cllr Sarah Doyle	Liverpool City Council (V&P Chair)
Jonathan Downs	Oldham Council (Accountable Body)

In Attendance:

Nicola Huckerby	CCIN (Minutes)
Cllr Denise Scott-McDonald	Representing Cllr Anthony Okereke
Josh McAlister	Chair of Foundations (Item 2)
Fiona Gibson	Cardiff Council (representing Cllr Peter Bradbury)
Cllr Mike Stubbs	Newcastle-Under-Lyme Labour Group (Vice Chair) (Item 9.2)

Apologies:

Cllr Anthony Okereke	Royal Borough of Greenwich
Cllr Kelly Middleton	Telford & Wrekin Council

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

- 1.1. Cllr Gittins welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 1.2. Apologies were noted.

2. Josh MacAlister OBE – Chair of Foundations

- 2.1. Cllr Louise Gittins welcomed Josh, the author of the MacAlister Review on children's social care. One of the Review's recommendations was to establish regional care cooperatives.
- 2.2. Josh outlined some of the challenges faced by the sector:
 - The imbalance of privatisation in the system which is acute in residential care (around 80%) and growing in foster care. All of which is funded by local authorities.
 - Where children are living – the number of children in residential care V those in foster care or family networks. This has meant more children are being looked after in residential care

which were referred to as 'bungalow care' which unfortunately made lots of claims of therapeutic interventions but most did not deliver. These homes were not where they were needed and 40% of children were moved many miles away.

- They looked at whether they could introduce profit caps but, in the end, decided that this would not bring about the changes needed: it would not dramatically increase the supply of foster carers or kinship carers, nor provide the necessary support for families to keep children out of care. Without dealing with these issues, the system would continue to increase demand and therefore continue the need for councils to 'spot purchase' very expensive residential and inadequate care for children – **the system needed rebalancing.**
- 2.3.** Josh explained that he wanted to explain to EOC the structural recommendation to move the care function of commissioning, building and running foster care and residential care from councils into new Regional Care Cooperatives. These would be bodies governed and owned by groups of local authorities, of which there would be 15-20 across England. Currently, most councils are trying to create a very tailored provision eg in Foster Care for large sibling groups or for children who were on remand so that they do not need to be sent to a Young Offenders institution. Or Residential Care for children with autism. The Review concluded that it was extremely difficult for local authorities to project what those needs might be by themselves. Nor do they have the ability to finance it by themselves.
- 2.4.** The proposal is that monies and staff allocated to children's social care would be transferred to a new Care Cooperative which would operate on a Regional basis and provide:
- All of that spending would be allocated on a regional basis
 - Care would be planned across the Region
 - Homes would be built in the Region where children were growing up
 - The cooperative would specialise in recruiting foster carers and training
- 2.5.** LAs generally have small foster teams, which are having to compete against private sector companies with significant funds to invest in pipeline management and marketing. The problem is that if we don't change course, this will lead to further privatisation, and children will not get the homes they need.
- 2.6.** DFE have said they don't think there is a serious appetite for this in Local Government.
- 2.7.** The Pathfinders are taking the proposal slightly further forward, and they are being asked to use some money that the govt is giving to councils on some coordinated shared work.
- 2.8.** Josh reported that half of all Local Authorities don't have a published 'Children's Social Care Sufficiency Statement and Plan' which is a Statutory requirement. That document sets out what each council thinks demand for care will be in the coming year.
- 2.9.** Observations:
- Relationship between National and Local Govt is in a bad place
 - Councils are failing children in care – not educating them on how to be grown-ups, budgeting etc
 - The Govt will not give the necessary funding to improve the situation
 - Kinship budgets are inadequate
 - It is up to local authorities to try and find alternative ways to tackle these issues
 - Shortage of qualified of Social Workers
 - We need to do some mapping to see what councils are already doing which could lead to the Network doing its own pilot on what it wanted to achieve.
 - How would the NHS be involved in improving children's social care, e.g. mental health budgets?
 - There will always be a need for really good specialist providers, e.g., **Juno CIC**, a not-for-profit company opening high-quality residential care homes for children and young people in Liverpool City Region. However, funding is not based on long-term need; it is based on the short-term funding of spot places.
 - **Foster4** is a pioneering foster carer recruitment service. Based at Warrington Borough Council's offices, a collaborative project, recruiting foster carers on behalf of three Cheshire

Local Authorities: Cheshire West and Chester Council, Halton Borough Council and Warrington Borough Council.

2.10. Agreed: To establish a focus group to look at some of these issues.

Action: Cllr Louise Gittins and NH to identify next steps.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 4 October 2023

These were agreed upon as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising from the previous meeting

4.1. Cooperative College Training Modules

NH reported that the Cooperative College had given access to the data on who had registered to undertake the training courses, but we still didn't know who had completed it.

Action: NH to follow-up.

4.2. Officer session on using the DPS

Jonathan Downs reported that Oldham was still to appoint a Head of Procurement, once appointed he would report back so that the session could be arranged.

Action: Jonathan Downs to follow-up.

4.3. Finance and General Purposes Group

The Terms of Reference for the F&FGP Group were approved.

4.4. Oldham Policy Lab reports

Jonathan Downs reported that the outstanding Policy Labs led by Oldham Council (Cooperative Approaches to Sustainable Food—2019 and Tackling the Barriers to Building the Coop Economy—2021) were both in the design stage. Both reports should be presented at the June V&P Meeting before final approval at the June EOC meeting and then launch.

Action: Jonathan Downs to follow-up.

5. Finance and Budget Update

5.1 Budget 2023-4

Jonathan Downs reported that he had presented the up-to-date finance position at the F&GPG meeting on 4 March. Birmingham City Council issued a Section 114 notice, reducing budgeted income. Budget lines for Travel expenses and accommodation, Website maintenance, and email costs have increased.

5.2 Membership fees received and outstanding

Jonathan Downs presented a new quarterly report outlining membership fees received and outstanding.

The Chair welcomed the report and thanked JD for pulling it together.

6. Feedback from V&P Board meeting 22nd February 2024

6.1. Nicola Huckerby gave feedback on behalf of Cllr Sarah Doyle as. There were two substantive issues considered at the February V&P meeting:

6.2. Reviewing and agreeing on the delivery process for 2023/24 funded projects.

6.3. Identifying Project Sponsors who would be responsible for guiding a project through the delivery process.

7. Policy Labs and Prototypes 2024

Cllr Louise Gittins reminded all members to submit comments on the new Policy Project Bids by the end of March 2024 so that offer letters can be issued.

Action: N Huckerby

8. Membership Update

8.1. N Huckerby gave an update on the latest Membership numbers:

- Full Members – 47
- Associate Members – 25

- Affiliate Members – 51
 - Supporters – 22
- 8.2** The 47 Full Councils represent 12.35m citizens and control a budget of £21.4bn. In addition, we have eleven Parish, Town and Community Councils whose populations and budgets are 334k and £10.88m, respectively.
- 8.3** Since the last meeting several members had withdrawn:
- Kidsgrove Town Council
 - Beartas
 - Evenbreak
 - Royal Society of Arts
- 8.4** Since the last meeting there have been two new Associate Member applications, three new Affiliate Member Application and a Supporter application.
- Agreed:** to welcome Central North Swindon Parish Council as a new Associate Member
- Agreed:** to welcome Kidsgrove Labour Group as a new Associate Member
- Agreed:** to welcome Action Together as a new Affiliate Member
- Agreed:** to welcome Cooperative Heritage Trust as a new Affiliate Member
- Agreed:** to welcome Refernet as a new Affiliate Member
- Agreed:** to welcome Vince Barry-Stanners as a Supporter
- Agreed:** to retain Birmingham City Council as a Full Member whilst in Special Measures.
- Agreed:** to offer Tameside Council a 25% discount as they considered withdrawing for budgetary issues.
- 8.5** **Noted:** N Huckerby had contacted the Leader of Newcastle City Council, who was considering withdrawing from the Network, she would report back on progress to the group.
- 8.6** N Huckerby and J Downs confirmed that they would be closely monitoring the budget should other members decide to leave.

9. Strategy Objectives and Key Results 2024-6

- 9.1.** The Chair gave an update on progress. We had a short discussion about this on 20th February where people seemed happy with the direction of travel, there is also an update in the March Newsletter. The Vision has been agreed **“UK Councils that are using cooperative values and principles to build resilient places through community wealth-building and co-produced services.”**

And a 4-part focus:

- Membership
- How we work as councils
- How we work with partners and communities
- Policies and practice

Morgan Jones from Cheshire West and Chester has agreed to provide some leadership for this project working with other Officer Leads. Cllr Gittins has agreed to meet with the Officer Group to progress this work.

- 9.2. Legal Constitution** - Cllr Mike Stubbs joined the meeting to update EOC on work that he and Claire Ward from Anthony Collins Solicitors had been doing on the future structure of the organisation. CW had prepared a document which outlined seven different types of structure, and these had been honed to two:

- A cooperative
- A charitable incorporated organisation

The next step is for CW to do some further work on these options and report back to the next meeting.

Agreed: All members' views should be sought on the future legal structure of the CCIN.

Agreed: this is the first item for the June meeting. **Action:** Nicola Huckerby.

10. Events Update

10.1. Feedback from the Annual Conference 2023 in Sunderland

The general view was that it was a brilliant conference, in terms of the welcome, the scale of the programme and the number of attendees – but there needed to be more time to discuss everything! Should it be a three-day event next time?

10.2. Event Schedule 2024

Agreed: to arrange more online events this year to help us engage a wider group of members.

Agreed: to look at holding events/meet ups for Members on our Exhibition Stands at the LGA and Labour Party Conferences, which might include some high-profile guests. Jonathan Bland suggested organising a private event for invited guests if the programme and budget allows.

Agreed: to set a date for the Annual Conference & AGM once the date of the General Election was announced and to seek bids from London Councils to host.

Agreed: to look at exhibiting at the Liberal Democrat Party Conference if the budget allowed.

10.3. Study Visit to Emilia-Romagna – 10 – 15 March 2024

Nicola Huckerby took the EOC through the programme for the Study Visit, which would involve 25 delegates from 16 organisations, including the Coop News, who will be reporting on the visit. Delegates will visit several cooperatives, including those involved in social care, transport, food production, regional banking, transport, and the University of Bologna.

11. Schedule of Future Meetings

20th June 10-12 noon.

10th September 10-12 noon.

The meeting finished at 1145 hours.