

The Co-operative Party Exeter & Devon Branch Newsletter

Secretary: Saxon Spence
Tel: 01392 271785

1 Lancaster Close, Exeter, EX2 5SW.
e-mail: smspence@phonecoop-coop

Issue 3

November, 2011

Conference on Co-operative Councils

Cllr. Steve Reed, leader of Lambeth Borough Council, was the key speaker at the conference in Exeter on the 8th October, and proved to be really inspirational. He set out the principles on which Lambeth had based its commitment to becoming a Co-operative council. The determining factor was that by creating local services on a co-operative basis the council's assets were locked – they could not be moved or sold off. The basic structure was smaller and they saw this as a way of protecting services that are desirable but not essential.

He empathized the difference between the model Lambeth was using to the so called John Lewis model which is employee owned. They were working with UNISON to create the culture of the future. Co-operation is not a magic word and it was essential to engage the workforce and users. There could be a danger of fragmentation and lack of sustainability. It was important not to replicate the problems of the private sector or secure change on the backs of staff.

We learnt how Lambeth had used the co-operative ethos to develop its services and had been able to create local provision that sprang from what local people themselves decided they needed and about which they felt they had control and choice. Housing, youth services, managing of personal care budgets had all benefited from this approach.

He ably answered the questions about how to work with staff so that they welcomed this approach rather than saw it as a threat. He led a workshop for councillors from Exeter City and Plymouth City councils to help them in exploring how they can use co-operative principles in their manifestoes.

Linda Gilroy, formerly MP for Plymouth Sutton, and South West representative on the Co-operative Party National Executive, spoke and lead a workshop on Co-operative Values. Paula Black, county councillor for Totnes, was the third speaker showing the application of co-operative principles in rural areas. Examples were the Totnes energy co-op, a food co-op and the decision of KEVICs, the local comprehensive college to become a Co-operative Trust School.

Altogether a very worthwhile day which showed how relevant Co-operative principles and practice are to us in the South West. A national Co-operative

Councils Network has been set up which the Plymouth Labour Group has joined.

Don't miss the next Exeter & Devon Co-operative Party branch meeting

Monday, 28th November, 7.00 pm at Exeter Labour Party HQ
26B Clifton Hill

The speaker at 7.45 will be DAVID CONNELLY
Chair of Plymouth Primary Care Trust

He has years of experience in health policy and local government.
His theme will be the impact of Government NHS policy on delivery
of Health and Social Care.

A chance to find out about the latest developments.

This part of the meeting is open to interested non-members.

Branch News

The September branch meeting welcome Linda Gilroy, newly elected to represent the south west Region on the Co-operative Party's National Executive. She reflected on the Party's Annual Conference and the challenges the year ahead held for the party – as usual there were lots of questions and discussions continued informally over refreshments.

The branch continues to welcome new members including Greg Sheldon, Exeter City Councillor for Heavitree Ward and Karl Knill who will be standing for Labour in St Loyes Ward next May, as well as Labour-Co-operative city councillor, Richard Branston, for Newtown. It is particularly good news that we have three new youth members and hope they will get involved in our activities.

National News

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING TENURE BILL

Jonathan Reynolds MP's bill to enshrine Co-operative Housing in English Law for the first time was successfully given its first reading in October. This Bill aims to end the essentially feudal nature of England's land ownership laws and create a new form of tenure, Co-operative Housing Tenure. Creating a distinct form of co-operative housing tenure would ensure that administration is reduced, courts better understand the nature of co-op housing and lenders and investors find co-operative housing more attractive. Fundamentally, the change to the law as outlined in the Ten Minute Rule Bill will mean that co-operative housing will be more viable, more widespread and allow tenants to organise themselves and their neighbourhoods.

Jonathan said of the Bill: "It is now harder than ever for young people to find a home of their own and if we are to address this issue it is time to look beyond the traditional options of ownership or tenancy. "This Bill would open the way for the development of true 'co-operative housing schemes', which are not currently acknowledged in Law in the UK."

The Co-operative Housing Tenure Bill being introduced by Jonathan Reynolds MP has been pulled together by the Co-operative Party and CDS Co-operatives – the main player in the UK housing co-operative sector. The Bill is being co-sponsored by a range of Labour and Labour & Co-operative Members of Parliament. You can support the HomeShares campaign by signing the petition or tweeting about it

CENTRAL SURREY HEALTH

A very worrying development is the news that Central Surrey Health, a much-feted employee owned co-operative, has lost out on a major NHS contract to a private health company owned by Virgin Healthcare. Central Health Surrey, owned by the nurses and managers who work in it, was the first employee-owned co-operative created in 2004. The Cabinet Office has confirmed that CHS delivered substantial improvements in quality and efficiency, but quality counted for less in the tendering process than the ability to raise capital. The several dozen new employee spin-outs from the NHS will have to go through this tendering exercise after only three years, despite the movement calling for longer contractual terms and assistance with capital. This means that the private sector will be able to Hoover up NHS services in a short time – an outcome that was never part of the settlement with NHS employees.

The chief executive of Social Enterprises UK, Peter Holbrook, said: “If Central Surrey Health, the government’s flagship mutual social enterprise, which has demonstrated considerable success in transforming health services, reducing waiting times and increasing productivity can’t win, what does that say for the future of the mutuals agenda.”

Paul Barker commenting in The Guardian puts the issue clearly: “David Cameron gave staff-owned Central Surrey Health a ‘Big Society’ award. But its first attempt to win business in the NHS market has failed, triggering fears for future empire spin-outs. The damage for ministers around a faltering mutuals agenda is not just an embarrassment but credibility. A common critique of spin outs is that they are being set up to fail by a government which has a secret agenda to break up the NHS and allow private corporations in through the back door. Will ministers fight for mutuals, and act to assure social enterprises can compete for contracts on a level playing field, or will they sit passively by – as they have with the work programme – and simply wring their hands as the big corporate clean up at the expense of charities, small businesses and social enterprises?”

With the concern over Circle’s take-over of Hinchinbroke Hospital, it makes worrying background to our meeting on the 28th November which looks at what is happening to our NHS.

STEPHEN TWIGG HEADS TO EDUCATION, GARETH THOMAS NOW SHADOW MINISTER FOR CO-OPS

Several Co-operative MPs, including some elected to Parliament in 2010, have featured prominently in Ed Miliband’s reshuffle of the shadow frontbench team.

Joining Ed Balls MP and Lord Steve Bassam in Shadow Cabinet will be Stephen Twigg, Labour & Co-operative MP for Liverpool West Derby since 2010 and now Shadow Education Secretary. Stephen served as a Schools Minister in the Government of 2001- 2005. Following his appointment Stephen said, “Education is my passion, so I was absolutely delighted to have been appointed as the Shadow Education Secretary. Week after week since my election in 2010, I have been visiting schools across my constituency. Improving education for all children is crucial for the future of the country.”

Gareth Thomas MP, Chair of the Co-operative Party, has joined the Cabinet Office team as Shadow Minister for Civil Society. He was a minister of state at the former Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform and at the Department for International Development under the last Labour government. Following Ed Miliband's election as leader, he became shadow minister for higher education and science until his latest appointment. This position covers co-operatives, community interest companies and social enterprises, and Gareth follows in the footsteps of former Co-operative MPs Phil Hope and Angela Smith who held the portfolio when Labour was in Government.

Elsewhere in the reshuffle, Co-operative MPs and peers continue to hold positions in a broad range of areas. Jonathan Reynolds MP is now PPS to the Leader of the Opposition alongside John Denham. Cathy Jamieson MP and Stella Creasy MP have joined the Treasury and Home Office frontbench teams respectively.

A full list is below:

Treasury Rt Hon Ed Balls MP Chris Leslie MP Cathy Jamieson MP

Home Office Stella Creasy MP

Defence Gemma Doyle MP

Energy and Climate Change Tom Greatrex MP Luciana Berger MP Rt Hon Baroness Angela Smith

Health Baroness Glenys Thornton

Education Stephen Twigg MP

Transport John Woodcock MP

Coming Events:

Saturday, 19th November 10.30-1.00 – Exeter Labour Party Christmas Bazaar, the Corn Exchange, Exeter, where we will have a stall promoting Fairtrade. Do come along to support us.

Monday, 28th November, 7.00 p.m. – The main speaker will be David Connelly, chair of Plymouth PCT who will talk about the impact of NHS changes on health and social care.

Did you know that 2012 will be
the United Nations International Year of Co-operatives?

To help us understand what this means internationally, nationally and locally the South West Party Council is making this the theme of its annual weekend school.

This will take place at Brunel Manor, Torquay.

Saturday and Sunday, 21st.22nd January

Contact the secretary if you are interested in attending.

Monday, 27th February – The 2012 Branch AGM will be held at 7.00 pm at Exeter Labour Party HQ. This will be followed by a reception to mark the start of Fairtrade Fortnight when we welcoming our two visitors from a dried fruit Fairtrade producer in Pakistan.