

Edinburgh Council spearheading the Cooperative Council approach



As part of the original Labour Group manifesto one of the promises made was to look at cooperative ways of working. This approach is now beginning to bear fruit according to the council leader, Andrew Burns.

Last year Edinburgh Council promised to run four exemplar projects in Edinburgh after a conference held here to discuss the benefits of Cooperative Councils. The council is due to report on the progress of these cooperative initiatives at a seminar with trade unions, third sector, councillors and other stakeholders in Edinburgh next month, and to the full council in November after that.

Libraries and other council buildings outwith the World Heritage Site in the city centre could be used for photo-voltaic (PV) solar panels if the council's plans work. Electric car-charging points will be installed across the city and district heating initiatives will be explored.

This is an example of a cooperative scheme being actively considered and acted upon by the council right now, partly as a result of a manifesto pledge by the Labour group before the May 2012 election, and partly in a cost-cutting measure to ensure there are enough funds for other projects in the council budget.

The whole point of the cooperative approach is to make a profit from delivering services, and that profit will be put back into retaining and preserving the service, or otherwise invested in the community, in schemes such as play parks.

This is headlined as a new way of running a local authority which is dependent on civic leadership, with councils working in equal partnership with local people to strengthen communities.



Council Leader –
Andrew Burns

Councillor Burns explained:-“The idea is to tie all the various pockets of activity together and amass this into a scaled up model which then makes a profit. Some of these areas may not work but we chose four specific areas as pilot projects. By bringing these together we hope that savings can be made as a cooperative with critical mass. The money made as profit would then be funnelled back into maintaining and protecting the services.

“There are two things which will come from this: to make good our promise to involve people more in decision-making and the delivery of services, and also to ease the pressure on council services.”

The council is now looking at joining a UK cooperative network. The idea is to learn from other projects across the UK whether these are successful or not, and use ideas of best practice here in the capital.

On the back of the cooperative seminar held in Edinburgh last year and the report which came to council last October, the council set up four pilot projects in the areas of energy, housing, social care and childcare.

It is clearly something that the council leader is very enthusiastic about.

He said:-“Last year the council set up a Cooperative Development Unit with five or six staff under the leadership

of Nick Croft in implementation of one of the Capital Coalition pledges.

“I will be looking for delivery of these projects during next year and onwards. I want this to mushroom so that we will then have lots of these in operation. The plan is to use the meeting here next month as a platform to tell people what we have done, and then we will take our ideas forward to the full council as to what might happen after that.

☒ “I want to have solar panels installed on about 25 council buildings which can be community centres, schools and libraries. The energy cooperative which will be set up can install solar panels before the end of this year. Who knows, wind turbines might also follow, although that might be a little trickier.”

Solar panels will be installed on the roofs of council owned buildings outwith the city centre where the installation would be restricted by planning regulations. The profit from the energy produced and then sold back to the grid will be used in community projects. (The Lord Provost Donald Wilson has apparently installed these on his own house to great effect!)

The council leader explained that the council has supported the new Harlaw Hydro project by donating officers' time rather than cash to the project. All of the profit made when this is up and running will be first of all paid to the shareholders and then used in community projects. Harlaw Hydro has been a great success so far. It was oversubscribed at the initial fundraising stage and they already have planning permission to build the hydro scheme.

Burns continued:-“There will then be a report to the council in November which people can feed into and which will be influenced by the debate at the cooperative seminar in October.

“The biggest advantage of this cooperative model is doing

things with people rather than do things to people. For too long political bodies and councils have done that. This should be a more efficient way of working.

“We are trying to create frameworks around which it is easier to set up these cooperatives in other areas. All the changes we have made such as introducing the Petitions Committee and the Governance and Risk Committee are reflective of these ideals.”

There is some information about Cooperatives on the council website about cooperatives which you can find [here](#).

Last month, Andrew Burns was asked to speak at an event in Glasgow when he explained to councillors there the benefits of the cooperative approach, and the reasons for first considering them. He said:-“In the run up to the 2012 Local Poll, we knew without any shadow of a doubt that we had to have a very different approach and a very **bold** offer to put before the electorate.

“The experiences of Councils like Lambeth, Newcastle, Stevenage, Oldham and several others who were already pursuing a Co-operative Approach ... did have a great influence on our thinking.

“It led us to take – what at the time – was seen as a huge gamble, by publishing a fully worked-up Draft Manifesto a full 6-months prior to the actual Election, in November 2011.

“That Draft Manifesto had a raft of Co-operative commitments, based on a combination of local experience and external influences; from many of the Councils I’ve just mentioned – and we thereafter consulted on those Draft proposals, all the way through to early February 2012.”

In his speech at the Cooperative Glasgow event, Burns explained the detail of the four areas which have been used by the council as pilot projects:-

1. Childcare and Education

We have established an SLA with LAYC to support the Out of School Care sector, to identify and help those who wish to transition to co-operative status. One club has applied to

the Co-operative Enterprise Hub and the process involved with this club will provide a road map for others wishing to change their governance arrangements.

There is substantial interest from clubs in the development of strategies for mutual collaboration and co-operation including the development of a "co-operative charter."

The Co-operative Education Trust is working with the Broughton Cluster of schools to develop an action plan that will include transition activities based on co-operative principles, values and practices between nursery, primary and secondary schools.

2. Health & Social Care

Employee Owned Social Care Co-operative

As part of our Market Shaping Strategy we are supporting the development of personalised services and self directed support to launch an Innovation Fund (£300K in 2013/14 and £100k in 2014/15. We are specifically inviting applications to the Fund, to be launched on 1 October 2013, for a contribution of up to £50,000 towards the costs of establishing an employee owned health and social care co-operative.

Edinburgh Development Group Care Co-operative

The Edinburgh Development Group has asked for support and advice with a view to establishing a Care Co-operative for the benefit of adults with severe disabilities, to be managed by their parents/ siblings. The aim is to establish a workforce, providing care and support. The aforementioned fund will provide a route for the Group to apply for the modest funding they need to progress the formation of the co-op.

Workforce Learning & Development Co-operative

We are exploring funding options to make CEC/NHS Lothian e learning/workforce development tools available to voluntary/private sector health and social care services, via co-operative venture, to standardise the induction and other training all care workers in Edinburgh receive, regardless of who their employer is.

Departmental Co-operative Development Team

We are establishing a department team to raise awareness of co-operative development opportunities and better co-ordinate our response to expressions of interest in these.

3. Energy Cooperative Initiatives

Edinburgh Community Energy Projects Group has identified three priorities:

- Solar PV on Public Buildings;
 - Electric Vehicle Charging Points across the city;
- and
- District Heating / CHP.

Edinburgh Community Energy Co-op is working with CEC on a solar photovoltaic and is currently identifying suitable locations for these projects.

Citywide Residential ESCO

A group of housing associations has researched the potential of an energy supply company to benefit tenants. They will develop a business plan with a view to being operational in 2014. Castle Rock Edinvar will work with CEC to take this forward.

Harlaw Hydro

Harlaw Hydro is an Industrial Provident Society created by the Balerno Village Trust to install and operate a micro-hydro electricity generator at Harlaw Reservoir. A community share offer raised the funds for this. Income generated will allow Harlaw Hydro Ltd to contribute to projects in the local area through the Balerno Village Trust.

4. Cooperative Housing Arrangements

A Cross Party Political Sounding Board for co-operative approaches to housing has been established and the first meeting was held on 20 March 2013.

We are developing our co-operative approaches to housing through:

- Reviewing and researching the existing co-operative models in place;
- Exploring tenant and customer commitment to co-operative models; and
- Evaluating the 'value for money' implications of co-operative models.

Opportunities for co-operative housing/ estate management are being explored for new developments at West Pilton and Greendykes with a view to developing a model for Community Co-ops to be piloted with new tenants from 2014.

We are considering whether Community Land Trusts provide a

co-operative model for delivering new homes.

We are exploring potential for a community led co-op approach to furniture and support for new tenants and residents. Discussions have taken place with ETF and work is being taken forward through our Empty Homes Action Group.

At the council's Policy & Strategy Committee in a couple of weeks time the council will vote on joining the Cooperative Councils Innovation Network which is an organisation reformed from a previous body called Cooperative Councils Network. The cost of joining is about £4,000 for half a year.

This expense will, according to the council leader, be money well spent as the council will then get lots of information on projects of this kind run elsewhere in the UK and be able to benefit from the experience of others.

It is believed that there may be as many as 80 cooperatives working in Edinburgh right now. If you are involved with one of those then perhaps you would like to tell us about your organisation? Send us your news by clicking [here](#).

The Council is keen to keep the public informed about areas where it has managed to gain ground on any of its coalition pledges.

These are the 50 odd headings under which the Capital Coalition was set up. There is a traffic light system which shows how the council is addressing and dealing with each one. Largely the council is managing to gain a green or amber light on most as you can see [here](#).