

CO-OPERATIVES UK

Call for evidence on business support for co-operatives and non-financial mutuals: final draft response

February 2026

Data and experiences of co-operatives and non-financial mutuals

- 1. If the co-operative and non-financial mutuals sector were to grow, what do you expect the key impacts would be? Draw on evidence, where possible.*

You may wish to consider:

- short, medium, and long-term implications*
- the economic, social, and environmental impact*
- national and local impacts*
- place-based impacts such as impacts in rural, urban and coastal areas*
- any risks, challenges, or unintended consequences that might arise*

As we set out in our *Policy Plan for Growth* pursuing rapid co-operative development will have the following beneficial impacts that contribute to government's Plan for Change, Missions and other priorities:

- **Inclusive growth from the grassroots** – Co-operatives make a disproportionately large contribution to UK GDP, while simultaneously delivering the following co-benefits: fairer distribution of value, increased firm resilience, improved productivity, enhanced wellbeing and community wealth building. Specific proof points include:
 - Co-operatives accounting for 0.6% of UK GVA but just 0.25% of businesses
 - UK co-operatives demonstrating a greater propensity to achieve a degree of scale than UK businesses generally, with 35% having 10 or more employees vs just 19% of UK businesses generally
 - Labour productivity in worker co-operatives being 8-12% greater than in comparable non-worker owned firms
 - Co-operatives are 4 times more likely to have Real Living Wage accreditation than UK businesses generally.
 - The gender pay gap in co-operatives is 7.5%, compared to the UK average of 12%
 - Dairy farmers that sell through a co-operative receive 18% more of the retail price of a litre of milk than non-co-operating peers
 - Co-operative start-ups in the UK are consistently found to be twice as likely to survive the first five years of trading than UK start-ups generally. Studies regularly find co-operatives and mutuals are also more resilient in the long-term than firms generally

- Researchers have found connections between wellbeing and enhanced social capital, resilience, security and a greater degree of control over things like work, housing and services
- On community wealth building, evidence from the USA suggests that for every \$1 million in revenue, worker co-operatives recirculate about \$1.42 million within the local economy, compared with \$0.80 million from conventional firms
- **Community resilience and social cohesion** – Co-operatives empower individuals and organisations to achieve things together that they cannot do on their own. Communities increasingly use co-operatives to save and revitalise physical assets and essential services that they need to thrive. Thousands of long-established social and sports clubs, critical to community life and wellbeing, are co-operatives. Studies find that co-operatives in communities add resilience and encourage cohesion by building social capital, delivering responsive and accountable services and providing essentials such as housing. Specific proof points include:
 - The growth and diversification in the use of Community Shares (a unique form of co-operative crowdfunding) to enable community ownership of land, buildings, housing, amenities, social infrastructure, cultural venues, green infrastructure and more
 - Evidence that Community Shares are overwhelmingly used as a tool to democratise ownership and participation, with 56% of people investing in a community share offer earning £35,000 or less in 2020
 - Evidence that Community Shares activates people's desire to participate in collective action that benefits their community and wider society, with 80% of people investing in community share offers because of the wider social or environmental benefits of the co-operative
 - Research finding that increased social capital and community resilience tends to be one of the benefits of co-operatives, especially when they can operate at a communal level (e.g. housing scheme, credit union, rural amenity, regeneration), and even more so when a 'co-operative system' supports multiple aspects of communal life, as is the case in many rural European regions (see OECD research on this)
 - Research showing correlations between limited social infrastructure and limited social capital, and a rise in distrust, polarisation and political extremism
- **Addressing market and public service failures:** There are opportunities to proliferate and scale proven co-operative solutions that address failures in areas such as rural development, climate and environment, social care, early years, education, food system and housing. Specific proof points include:
 - Plunkett UK reports that rural community co-operatives have increased in number by 59%, bucking a trend of rural business closure, and the most critical motivations behind them are creating a community hub and safeguarding essential assets and services
 - Polling for Common Wealth has found 62 per cent of the public would support a community-owned renewable energy project in their area, compared to 40 per cent support for a privately-owned project
 - Retrofit co-operatives experienced a 9-fold increase in clients during the period from 2020 to 2023, when progress in UK retrofit stalled

- According to soon-to-be-published research by the Centre for Care, UK co-operatives in social care appear to perform better in terms of pay, progression, retention and worker engagement than for-profit providers, while also being able to invest and innovate where for-profit providers won't. Because of their purpose and ownership, care co-operatives also recirculate revenue in the system and in communities, rather than extracting and then offshoring profit and disguised profits, as large private equity providers do (see *Ending extraction in the UK care system* report, 2025). In some parts of the world, co-operatives and similar social solidarity organisations, play a very significant role in the provision of social care, including in many regions of Italy, Quebec and Japan. The role of co-operatives in social care provision is increasing in Catalonia and South Korea. The OECD has recently reported on the significant potential for the social economy, including co-operatives, to address societal challenges relating to care.
- Co-operation among farm businesses can enhance UK food security, by building resilience, supporting innovation, enhancing productivity, increasing profitability and managing volatility. For example, co-operation among farmers in UK horticulture has enabled a tenfold increase in production volumes over 27 years. USDA's partnership with co-operatives for its Value-added Producer Grant Programme was found to enhance the resilience of farm businesses. A survey of 11 farm systems in Europe shows collective action lifts farmers' perceived robustness, adaptability and transformability by pooling risk and widening finance and knowledge access.
- Rapid growth in co-operative and community-led housing will provide affordable and empowering housing options that respond to needs, where the market has failed. Co-operative and community led housing has an unrivalled ability to combine affordability with community cohesion, security, quality, responsiveness to need and environmental benefit. For example, the average rent for a room in a private rental shared housing co-operative in 2019 was 46% less than for a room in a privately rented shared house at the same point. The OECD has recently reported on the significant potential for co-operatives to address societal challenges relating to housing.

Rural co-operative development

Co-operatives can make a particularly important contribution to rural communities, supporting agriculture and providing services, amenities and infrastructure in ways that overcome rural challenges and market failures. This is very pronounced in rural Europe. For example, in the rural Italian region of Trentino, the density of the co-operative ecosystem across agriculture, banking, infrastructure and services, makes a significant contribution not only to economic viability, but to the sustaining of a distinctive, autonomous and proud way of life.

There is an important rural dimension to the co-operative economy in the UK. Most of the largest co-operatives are in agriculture, while rural community co-operatives have been a major source of new formations in recent decades. The more rural parts of the UK, such as in the Highlands and Islands, and parts of rural Wales and South West England, have the most co-operatives per capita.

The lack of a coherent rural development strategy from Defra or MHCLG, and the lack of 'rural proofing' across policy areas such as economic growth, communities, housing, certain

digital and green infrastructure and retrofit, risk missed opportunities for high-impact co-operative development.

Addressing socio-economic inequality

By design, co-operatives share value, wealth and power, and so contribute to genuinely inclusive growth. They can also empower otherwise disadvantaged and marginalised people to secure critical things like decent livelihoods, good housing, social infrastructure and effective services. Co-operatives therefore have huge potential to address socio-economic inequality.

However, the extent to which co-operative development reduces inequalities depends on:

- Whether any co-operative development interventions are intentionally designed and delivered to reach and empower disadvantaged and marginalised people
- The extent to which some co-operative development interventions are part of a broader programme of community-led economic development that intentionally aims to reduce inequalities – as the Pride in Place programme has the potential to demonstrate
- Whether existing co-operatives (especially worker, community, consumer and housing co-operatives) can thrive so they can reinvest in people and places that need it most

At the same time, it is essential that co-operative development initiatives are not overly-focused on the hardest to reach groups or the most deprived areas. In many such contexts, co-operative entrepreneurship is simply not the immediate answer to the complex challenges people face. And co-operative development will only be impactful if combined with effective public services and social support and can take many years to bear fruit. Learning from past programmes that involved enterprise development in challenge contexts, such as Business for Good West Yorkshire, Empowering Places, New Deal for Communities, Local Enterprise Growth Initiative and some EU Structural Fund initiatives, will be insightful here.

A key benefit of the co-operative model is how it enables more fortunate people to build organisations that work in solidarity with, and truly empower, disadvantaged and marginalised communities. Thus development support should also be open to more fortunate people, especially where they have a mission that will benefit society generally and disadvantaged and marginalized groups in particular.

Long-term societal impact

If rapid co-operative growth can be sustained over a period of decades, it will begin to show up at a societal level through inclusive growth, economic and communal resilience, enhanced wellbeing, better and more affordable housing, improved public services and food security. There is evidence that once co-operative clustering achieves a critical mass in a geographic area, these societal impacts can be especially pronounced. For example, in the Italian region of Emilia Romagna a dense co-operative ecosystem accounts for one-third of the region's GDP and the region boasts low-income inequality, as well as high levels of social capital. Meanwhile, due to the Mondragon co-operative ecosystem, the Alto Deba region of the Basque Country has a very high density of employment in co-operatives, and also benefits from comparatively low unemployment, low income inequality, high numbers of skilled people and high per capita income.

2. We are interested in reliable data sources that evidence the impact of co-operatives and non-financial mutuals on economic growth. What data sources are available that show the impact – positive, neutral, or negative – of co-operatives on economic growth?

Economic growth, for the purpose of this question, refers to the long-term increase in the productive capacity of the economy, typically measured by real (inflation-adjusted) growth in GDP.

If you are not aware of the data, feel free to skip this question. Anecdotal insights are welcome, but indicate if your response is based on personal experience.

DBT already refers to our best evidence on this question in its consultation document, which suggests that co-operatives make a positive contribution to GDP, while simultaneously generating inclusive co-benefits. This includes:

- Co-operative and Mutual Economy report 2025, Co-operatives UK
- Harnessing the Mutual Sector's Potential for Growth, WPI Economics
- Exploring the Potential of the Employee Ownership Business Model, WPI Economics

To re-iterate the key insights on growth from the above are:

- Co-operatives making a disproportionately large contribution to UK GVA (0.6% GVA from 0.25% of entities)
- Co-operatives having a greater propensity to achieve a degree of economic activity (35% having 10 or more employees vs 19% of businesses generally)
- Worker co-operatives and other employee owned businesses being 8-12% more productive than comparable firms

However, it is also important to understand how some co-operative models enable economic growth beyond the direct output of the organisations in question, for example:

- Farmer co-operatives that enable independent farm businesses to be more productive and profitable
- Community co-operatives that contribute to place-based regeneration, supporting local enterprise, and local people in relation to wellbeing, resilience, skills and opportunity
- Housing co-operatives that provide people with affordable, secure housing, enabling them to make economic contributions elsewhere.

We also believe its important that the Government doesn't just frame co-operative economic and social impact in terms of GDP. GDP has limitations, not least because it captures the volume of market transactions, rather than how economic value is created, distributed and sustained over time, which are often central to understanding the benefits of co-operatives. For example co-operatives may lower prices for members, improve employment conditions, reduce employee churn, or prevent service failure, but these wouldn't add directly to GDP.

Additionally, GDP doesn't capture the co-benefits of value, wealth and power being shared more broadly in society, or of community resilience and social cohesion.

International evidence

Our *Policy Plan for Growth* cites international evidence and insight.

We know DBT has already been drawing on international evidence and practice to inform its co-operative policy. We strongly urge it to continue doing so.

The OECD's work on the social economy, including co-operatives, can be especially valuable.

The World Co-operative Monitor 2025 provides evidence of the scale and sectoral presence of the 300 largest co-operative businesses in the world.

The European Research Institute on Co-operative and Social Enterprises (EURICSE) is an invaluable source of evidence and insight on co-operatives and the social economy. However, much of its output is not published in English.

Research in 2021 by the European federation of worker and multi-stakeholder co-operatives (CECOP) assessed the impacts of worker co-operatives in Spain and Italy. It finds worker co-operatives have on average more female employees than the labour force as a whole and are also more likely to offer flexible working and other policies to improve the work life balance. This has a positive effect on growth, with evidence that positive work life balances drives up employee productivity and a 2023 report by Goldman Sachs suggests removing barriers to women entering the workforce can drive up GDP.

The European Association of Co-operative Banks regularly publishes assessments of the performance of co-operative banks. Its 2025 report finds that co-operative banks are outperforming European banks generally in terms of commercial growth and financial resilience, while also doing more to support SME lending and to keep physical branches open.

3. How do different types of co-operatives and non-financial mutuals drive economic growth differently?

Consider worker, producer, consumer or multi-stakeholder co-operatives, as well as different legal structures for co-operatives and non-financial mutuals, for example co-operative society or company limited by guarantee.

While we should avoid over-generalisation, co-operatives generally drive inclusive growth, while also delivering social and environmental co-benefits.

Fastest growing co-operatives (by employees)

We have looked at trends in the co-operatives that reported the biggest percentage increase in employees between 2021 and 2025, with employee growth as a proxy for growing economic activity overall (excluding those who had 5 or fewer employees in 2021 to screen out the distortive impact of large changes from small baselines). Consumer and community co-operatives dominate the list of fastest growing co-operatives, but this likely reflects how they are the most common types overall. It does though demonstrate that these models are capable of growth. It is notable that there is a population of long-established social clubs and sports clubs that posted strong organizational growth between 2021 and 2025, showing that while many such organisations are in decline, they can be vibrant.

It is notable that multi-stakeholder, enterprise and employee ownership trust models are significantly over-represented among the fastest growing co-operatives (measured by change in employees between 2021 and 2025).

Consumer co-operatives

UK consumer retail co-operatives account for £16.5bn GVA and 60% of co-operative turnover. They are important players in key 'everyday' sectors such as convenience retail

and employ over 100,000 people. There are also thousands of small consumer owned co-operatives including social clubs, small retailers and service providers. The mean number of employees across all consumer co-operatives is 34, while the mean turnover is £5.3m, which are significantly higher than for the average enterprises in the UK. This demonstrates that a degree of scale and economic impact is inherent in a model that is built on collective endeavour and the pooling of economic and social capital.

The economic importance of everyday / foundational sectors is often overlooked in analysis that fixates on high-productivity and high-growth sectors. However, analysis by Oxford Economics has found that these sectors are critical to local economic performance and often generate more than half of all jobs in a region.

Consumer co-operatives tend to be very resilient and focused on the long-term. As a fundamental feature of their model, they prioritise reinvestment of revenues and surpluses in their operations, value to members, their people and the communities they trade in. For example, The Co-op recently announced £1bn of investment in UK supply chains and high streets.

At the same time, consumer co-operatives invest in innovation, diversification and acquisition. For example, The Co-op has leveraged its physical store network to become a leader in online convenience retail. The newly combined *OurCo-op* (a coming together of Central and Midcounties) has a diversified range of businesses including convenience retail, funerals, early years, travel and broadband.

Enterprise co-operatives

We tend to refer to 'producer co-operatives' as 'enterprise co-operatives', or 'consortium co-operatives', by which we mean those comprised of other businesses or entities. In the UK and around the world, many of the largest co-operatives fall into this category. In the UK this includes co-operatives comprised of independent farm businesses, wholesale co-operatives for building merchants and bakeries, and co-operatives comprised of independent hotels, health and social care providers, credit unions, local food businesses and broadband providers.

Our data also shows that the mean number of employees per enterprise co-operative in the UK has risen from 30 in 2021 to 34 in 2025, and the mean turnover has risen from £21.2m to £28.3m. These mean averages are significantly higher than for the average enterprises in the UK.

Yet the most important economic impact of these co-operatives tends to come not from their direct economic output, but in how they enable the businesses and organisations they serve to be more productive, profitable, resilient and impactful. For example, co-operation among growers in UK horticulture has enabled a tenfold increase in production volumes over 27 years.

Worker co-operatives

WPI research in 2023 found that labour productivity in UK worker co-operatives (within a wider cohort of employee-owned businesses) was 8-12% higher than in control groups of comparable firms. This aligned with the findings of previous research into productivity advantages in worker co-operatives using non-UK datasets (e.g. research by academic Virginie Pérotin).

Analysis by Co-operatives UK in 2022 found that up to a point, worker co-operatives have a propensity to achieve a greater degree of scale and to create more jobs than UK businesses generally. Proportionally they are much more likely to have 5-9, 10-19 and 20-49

employees. Again, this aligns with the findings of academics using non-UK datasets (e.g. Virginie Pérotin).

Our data also shows that the mean number of employees per worker co-operative in the UK (excluding trust-owned and self-employed co-operatives) has risen from 9 in 2021 to 10 in 2025 and the mean turnover has risen from £564,270 to £644,563. These mean averages are higher than for SMEs generally (8.6 employees and £198k turnover).

Crucially, the worker co-operative model combines these contributions to growth with very strong impacts in terms of worker income, wellbeing, progression, job and firm resilience and very low (often equal) top-bottom and gender pay ratios (see WPI Exploring the Potential of the Employee Ownership Business Model for best evidence using UK data).

Community co-operatives

Community co-operatives tend to be larger than the average small business or social enterprise, because by their nature they are formed through collective endeavour and the pooling of economic and social capital in a community. They often own assets such as land, property, or green infrastructure, which most businesses will never accomplish. The number of community co-operatives in the UK grew by 20% from 2021 to 2025, but their combined turnover grew by 56% and combined employees grew by 33%. Mean number of employees in community co-operatives rose from 4.1 to 4.6 over the same period, and the mean turnover from £219,944 to £288,963. These mean averages are higher than for the average small and under 10 year old enterprises in the UK.

Yet these important direct economic contributions are generally secondary to the inclusive and sustainable economic impacts they have by enabling place-based regeneration, supporting local enterprise, and local people in relation to wellbeing, resilience, skills and opportunity.

DBT should note that while community co-operatives often form around one discrete project (e.g. to save a local pub, build a solar farm) there are growing examples of onward development. An increasing number of community co-operatives engage in diversification, using an initial success and asset base as a foundation for further growth. For example, a rural shop becomes a multi-use community space and co-location hub for other services. Or a community energy generation scheme diversifies into retrofit and low carbon housing. The potential to unlock long-term economic and social impact by strengthening pathways for ongoing community co-operative development and diversification, should not be underestimated.

Community co-operatives that operate within the community leisure sector also have the benefit of embedding local views within service delivery. This ensures that growth into new services or expansion into another local authorities procurement is done with the support and for the benefit of the community who have a stake as opposed to a large private business simply chasing an expanded profit margin.

4. What data, if any, is available on the demographic characteristics – such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic status – of the management and workforce of individual co-operatives and non-financial mutuals in Great Britain?

If you are not aware of the data, feel free to skip this question. Anecdotal insights are welcome but indicate if your response is based on personal experience.

Unfortunately, we have limited demographic data on co-operatives in the UK. This is something that we would like to address with more resource.

We have however collected data on the CEO gender in co-operatives and compared with that in FTSE firms. Co-operatives are more than twice as likely as FTSE 100 firms to be led by women. Among the UK's top 100 co-operatives by income, 24% are led by women chief executives. This compares favourably to the FTSE 100, where just 9.4% of companies have women CEOs; the FTSE 250, where the figure is 6.1%; and the FTSE 350, with just 7.3% led by women.

In 2020, we undertook research to understand demographics in community co-operatives that had used Community Shares and found:

- 41% of community shares investors were women in comparison to just 9% of angel investors
- 56% of people investing in a community share offer earned £35,000 or less, while only 4% earned over £100,000.
- Community shares investors were predominantly white (92%) which was a higher percentage than reported in the UK 2011 Census (86%)
- 73% were university graduates
- 54% were homeowners and more than half (54%) are employed.

We concluded that while community shares was democratising ownership to a significant degree, the majority of community shares investors benefited from other structural privileges such as white ethnicity, attending university or owning their own home.

Since then we have analysed the impact of our Community Shares Booster Fund, which provides development grants and institutional equity investment alongside communities. We found that this support significantly increased successful use of the model in IMD 1-3.

Start-ups

5. Thinking about starting a business in the co-operative or non-financial mutual sector, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

those starting a business are not aware they can use a co-operative or mutual business model

We strongly agree. A lack of awareness and practical understanding of co-operative options, in communities and among mission-led entrepreneurs, existing businesses/organisations, and those who advise them, is a major barrier. Limited understanding of co-operatives among mainstream business advisors, social economy and third sector advisors, and in civil society organisations working in communities, is a significant barrier to their being more co-operative start-ups.

Furthermore, co-operatives are not adequately covered in relevant curricula, careers advice or business and enterprise education for young people and adults.

Co-operative approaches are therefore not explored frequently enough by those for whom it would be relevant to do so. For example, we encounter lots of social enterprises that attempt to crowdfund to save local assets, unaware of the co-operative model and its ability to crowd-in community investment.

Pre-technical development

We strongly recommend better resourcing and coordination of 'pre-technical' development, including targeted outreach to groups and communities, and supported exploration of co-operative options. Where this has been done (e.g. the proactive outreach by Co-operative Development Scotland in its best years, the work of Community Shares Wales, Employee Ownership Wales, the UnFound platform co-operative accelerator, the Community Ownership Fund, and the West Midlands Ownership Hub) the results have been more frequent exploration of co-operative options and, in time, more start-ups.

Pride in Place and Local Power Plan both have pre-technical elements designed into them, with community-led development in the former, and local/community project pipeline development in the latter, with resources for exploratory and early-stage advice and support in both. The key will be to ensure co-operative options are firmly 'on the menu' for communities in both Pride in Place and the Local Power Plan. Co-operatives UK is eager to facilitate collaboration between national government, local partners and the sector to make sure this happens.

We have learned that successful pre-technical development has to be undertaken with close proximity to target communities of interest and place. This generally means local delivery is more effective, though if the target is a certain group of professionals (e.g. social care innovators) or entrepreneurs (e.g. social tech founders), geographic proximity may be less critical. Effective pre-technical development also generally involves organisations (e.g. civil society organisations) and people who have the ability to connect with, secure the trust of, and inspire action of, distinctive groups and communities (e.g. particular cultural groups, socio-economic classes, professions).

It also often requires a more relational approach to delivery. For example, some of the most effective pre-technical outreach on employee ownership, was undertaken by account managers in Scottish Enterprise, who had an ongoing relationship with SMEs and could bring employee ownership into a wider discussion about retirement and succession planning.

Learning and evaluations from previous programmes such as Co-operative Development Scotland, Employee Ownership Wales, Community Shares Wales, UnFound, Empowering Places and the West Midlands Ownership Hub will be useful in informing any future policy and practice on pre-technical development.

it is more difficult for new co-operatives and non-financial mutuals to qualify for start-up capital support schemes than for other business models

We agree. Government's enterprise start-up finance interventions have under-served co-operatives to date:

- the design of the British Business Bank Start-up Loans scheme does not cater to co-operatives in two key areas: the default requirement for personal guarantees is a barrier to many co-operative types; the accompanying business support does not cater to co-operatives
- British Business Bank schemes like Angel CoFund do not cater to the distinctive way capital intensive start-ups raise growth capital, because the standard angel investor > venture capital > IPO/private equity routes do not cater to co-operatives
- government-backed social investment has had a limited impact on the financing of co-operative start-ups, and is widely thought to have under-served social enterprise generally, not least because of high returns required (see Adebowale Commission on Social Investment) with only some co-operative models eligible. Though things are

improving, not least through the work of Access - The Foundation for Social Investment

- eligibility criteria and processes of grant providers such as NLCF, Arts Council and Innovate UK can unnecessarily impede or exclude co-operatives

aspiring co-operative or non-financial mutual founders often lack the necessary skills to get started

Neither agree or disagree. The founders of co-operatives often have invaluable knowledge, skills and experience, relating to their community, their work, or their mission. But as with most founders of any type of business, they can benefit greatly from the right information, advice and support. Co-operative founders can particularly benefit from support on the distinctive approaches, challenges and opportunities inherent in setting up a co-operative.

business advisors lack awareness and understanding of co-operative or mutual business models

We strongly agree. We often hear from newly formed co-operatives, or from organisations looking to mutualise, that previous advisors have either not adequately covered co-operative options, dissuaded them from considering a co-operative model, or omitted co-operative options altogether. For example, our advisors often work with organisations that have been set up as non-co-operative CICs, charitable companies or CIOs (these being better understood forms) who have later found that a more co-operative model would be more optimal.

In 2018 research by the Alliance Manchester Business School found that half of surveyed business advisors (45%) admitted having no knowledge on the co-operative start-up process. In recent years we have run introductory training sessions on co-operatives for advisors working in growth hubs and capture the awareness and understanding of the models at the start. It is consistently very low.

We also have anecdotal evidence that accountants, lawyers and other professional advisors who have an influence on choices made by entrepreneurs, rarely understand or appreciate the potential of co-operative models.

There is a pool of expert co-operative development advisors in the UK, working as freelance consultants, in small agencies, or for sector bodies like Co-operatives UK and Plunkett UK. But this ecosystem is under-resourced, overly-fragmented and suffers from a limited supply of deep experience and expertise. We need to see an injection of funding into co-operative development.

investors lack awareness and understanding of co-operative or mutual business models

We strongly agree. The UK is held back by a lack of risk and growth capital that caters to co-operatives, limiting their ability to form in more capital-intensive sectors, or to form with a springboard for onward growth.

WPI Economics research found that private providers of start-up finance (e.g. investors, high street banks) under-serve co-operative start-ups in the following ways:

- the standard angel investor > venture capital > IPO/private equity exit route does not cater to ambitious or capital intensive co-operative start-ups
- lack of understanding of co-operatives among lenders and investors, results in reluctance to invest, inaccurate risk assessment and inappropriate pricing, while the rarity of co-operatives results in 'volume penalties' for these businesses

- policies and processes in banks, including inadequate know your customer checks and requirements for personal guarantees, unnecessarily impede access to products
- this is exacerbated when automated systems used by lenders and credit reference agencies rely on public corporate registers that are deficient in how they present and share information on co-operatives and mutuals

This is made worse by current limitations and ambiguities within the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act (CCBSA) and registrar policy, around how societies can issue shares to non-member investors. This includes a £100,000 holding limit on withdrawable shares that reduces its utility, uncertainty around exit options for non-withdrawable shares, and uncertainty around permitted returns for non-member investors.

Furthermore, the eligibility criteria and processes of philanthropic grant makers often unnecessarily impede or exclude co-operatives. Many such grant makers wrongly do not recognise that many co-operatives are a legitimate form of 'not-for-profit' business, due to a lack of understanding. This is exacerbated by the fact co-operative societies do not have the option of adopting a statutory asset lock, restriction on profit distribution or entrenchment of certain provisions in their rules that these funders sometimes prefer.

Many co-operatives, as with other social enterprise, also operate socially purposed business models, which do not support the repaying of some more expensive mainstream debt finance.

there are not enough visible success stories to inspire or guide co-operative or non-financial mutual start-ups

Neither agree or disagree. We are concerned that a lack of clear pathways for onward growth deters some ambitious founders from choosing a co-operative model when it might otherwise be the rational choice. Challenges around raising capital for onward development, real and perceived, are a particularly important factor here. This potential synergy between creating strong pathways for onward development, and encouraging and enabling high-potential start-up, is really important to get right.

And while there are already co-operative success stories, they receive too little attention from mainstream business discourse, media and advisors. As we evidence in our Co-operative and Mutual Economy report, co-operative start-ups tend to be much more successful, in terms of survival, job creation and value creation, than new starts generally. And there are examples of very impressive, impactful co-operatives in every sector, large and small, both new and decades old. The ongoing lack of professional understanding, limited societal awareness and gaps in education and training covering co-operatives, means these success stories are not as visible as they should be.

It will take more resources than currently available for awareness raising, outreach, education, and training, to significantly move the dial here. This is impacted by how business success is currently framed in social discourse. Instead of long-term value creation and social impact, entrepreneurial success is often framed in unrealistic terms of personal enrichment and fulfilment, including too often 'getting rich quick'.

Critically, while societal awareness is a strategic challenge, we strongly recommend that resource and effort is targeted at increasing awareness and exploration of co-operative models, by particular groups at critical junctures. For example, when local people are organising around issues with their high street, or when a group of care professionals are seeking better ways to deliver their service. The best way to increase societal awareness overall, is for there to be more thriving and impactful co-operatives in society, and for more resources to be put into showcasing what they do to potential imitators.

new co-operative or non-financial mutual founders lack access to peer support networks

We agree. While co-operatives are collaborative by their nature, and often eager to participate in peer support, the barrier comes from a lack of funding. Workers.coop has launched a small pilot start-up programme that utilises peer support. Co-operatives UK runs a small but successful peer support service as part of our Business Support for Co-ops programme. But this is currently only funded by the Co-operative Bank and provides a very limited number of days of peer support over the whole of the UK each year. We need an injection of funding alongside what the sector already provides, to boost the provision of quality peer support.

relative to other business founders, aspiring founders do not know where to find clear, accessible guidance and advice on starting a co-operative or non-financial mutual

We strongly agree. We often hear from newly-formed co-operatives that their journey to finding out about the model and accessing the right support was longer and more complicated than it needs to be. Too often, co-operative entrepreneurs tell us they found the model and the support 'by chance'.

At present, government's Business Growth Service and local services such as Growth Hubs rarely signpost adequately to appropriate information, advice and support on co-operatives. We are hopeful that as DBT works with Growth Hubs on co-operative and mutual support, this will improve.

Even when there is government funding for co-operative start-up support from a public agency, such as Co-operative Development Scotland within Scottish Enterprise, we have heard that the route to learning about the model and accessing the right support, has been far from straightforward.

This can be particularly true for rarer or more innovative co-operatives. For example, we have heard from formative student housing co-operatives that finding helpful support that helps them address the distinctive challenges they face in their nascent movement, is difficult.

We recommend the sector and government works together to create clearer start-up pathways built around specific growth opportunities, such as housing, renewable energy, social care and the food system. These should include effective outreach and signposting, replicable models, specialist advice, peer support and good finance options.

the rationale for starting-up a co-operative or non-financial mutual is different to starting-up another kind of business

We agree there can be important differences, particularly in the balance between individual private benefit vs mutual or communal benefit, and in the relative importance of collaboration and shared control vs founder control.

But co-operative models have the potential to respond to a mix of motivations that are present in many founders. Research regularly finds that there are a range of reasons why someone may set up any type of business, including creating something new, building a livelihood that has meaning for them, exercising agency and solving a problem. These are all reasons why people form co-operatives as well.

But individual private benefit (e.g. financial gain from profits, increased shareholder value, capital gain, individual self-fulfilment) is often an important motivation, among many, for founders of new businesses. In contrast, in new co-operatives these types of individual

private benefit are not the primary motivation. Rather, co-operative founders will be motivated by the prospect of mutual benefit, meaning benefits that accrue to them individually but also to others with shared needs and aspirations. They may also be motivated by the prospect of benefit for their community or by a wider social mission. Founders motivated by particular values such as solidarity, self-help, fairness and democracy will often find a co-operative approach appeals to them.

Furthermore, many traditional founders will be motivated by a desire to be in control. Co-operative founders in contrast, tend to be motivated by an analysis that they are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes collaborating with others, sharing responsibility and control with key stakeholders, rather than acting alone. This usually happens when the mission of the organisation is more important than the individual aspirations of the founders.

the process to start-up a co-operative or non-financial mutual is complex

We agree. But it could be made much simpler. It is partly complicated by all exogenous factors listed above. Furthermore, the corporate frameworks for business in the UK can make formation unnecessarily complicated and time-consuming. See our response to question 7 below.

It can also be complicated by the fact that collaboration and building democratic structures, can be more involved and require more time, than acting alone. But the benefits, in terms of pooled economic, social and human capital, greater capability, scale, resilience, and impact, will generally outweigh the 'costs' of any extra time and complexity. It is therefore vital that development support, and the resourcing of that support, is patient enough to enable this process to bear fruit.

6. In general, do co-operatives or non-financial mutuals face any unique barriers to starting-up that other types of business don't face? Explain your answer.

You may wish to consider barriers to accessing capital, market share, business support, investment, public awareness, or competition with other types of business.

In our view the most significant unique barriers are:

- **Awareness:** low awareness and practical understanding of co-operatives, in communities and among potential entrepreneurs, workers, businesses, investors and policymakers, and crucially those who advise them. This includes common myths and misperceptions (e.g. co-operatives are a convenience store chain, are small and uncommercial, are just for private benefit, are inefficient, are a choice of legal form, are just a choice of governance structure)
- **Culture:** cultural barriers to co-operation in parts of our economy, civil society, public administration, institutions and education system. Including perceptions that co-op is just a shop or that co-operatives and community businesses are small volunteer run groups.
- **Development ecosystems:** mainstream business support and established pathways act as a barrier to exploration and adoption of co-operative models. Meanwhile the co-operative development ecosystem is under-resourced, overly-fragmented and suffers from limited supply of 'boots on the ground' deep experience and expertise. Strong development pathways are too often lacking, which can deter ambitious founders from choosing a co-operative model when it might otherwise be rational to do so.

- **Access to finance:** co-operatives have distinctive approaches to raising finance that the legal, institutional and market conditions in the UK do not sufficiently enable. This creates challenges ranging from difficulties opening a business bank account, through to being unable to secure enough capital for early growth. A lack of good finance options for onward development, can deter ambitious founders from choosing a co-operative model when it might otherwise be rational to do so. Society law also hinders the ability of new societies to access finance, as discussed elsewhere
- **Legal and administrative:** there are unnecessary complexities, costs and burdens involved in operating as a co-operative, and especially when incorporating as a registered society.
- **Tax:** Tax law designed to support start-ups in the UK does not cater to co-operatives. For example, Business Asset Disposal Relief (BADR) provides an incentive and reward to founders who invest time and effort, as well as money, in building a business ('sweat equity'). But because BADR rewards founders when they sell their business, this does not cater to a founder realising 'sweat equity' within a ongoing co-operative structure. Furthermore, reliefs designed to help start-ups raise finance, such as Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) are designed to facilitate venture capital and so are of limited utility for many co-operatives.

7. Do different types of co-operatives or non-financial mutual models face different barriers to starting-up? Explain your answer.

You may wish to consider consumer, worker, producer, multi-stakeholder and community co-operatives, as well as trusts, clubs and societies, and direct and indirect employee-owned businesses.

You could also consider different legal structures for co-operatives and non-financial mutuals, for example co-operative society or company limited by guarantee.

Societies

Registered societies face a range of challenges that come with their otherwise very rationale choice of incorporation:

- **Ambiguities and uncertainty in registration:** ambiguities in society law leave significant discretion to the FCA as the registrar to determine if a society is eligible to be registered as a co-operative society or a community benefit society. This can create an uncertain registration process, particularly for more innovative societies. This uncertainty can also extend past the point of registration with registrar discretion leaving some societies fearing being deregistered if they attempt new innovative models.
- **Limitations in how key functionality can be combined:** Society law does not offer the option to combine a primary purpose of mutual member benefit with very useful mechanisms, such as a guarantee of social purpose, a statutory asset lock, profit lock or individual reserve. To adopt a statutory asset lock and guarantee social purpose and non-profit-distributing status, founders must choose to be a community benefit society, but at present at least, this form does not allow mutual member benefit. This forces suboptimal choices on many founders.
- **Inability to raise sufficient capital** due to crippling limitations and ambiguities within society law relating to withdrawable shares, tradability and permitted returns to non-member investors. This can affect all new societies, though there are particular

challenges for societies where ‘fully mutual’ status is important for tax reasons (e.g. housing co-operatives where all shareholders must be tenants, farmer co-operatives where all shareholders must be service users), as this appears incompatible with raising equity from non-member investors.

- **Confusing and burdensome audit requirements:** the law requires societies with turnover under £5,000 conduct a ‘lay audit’. Societies with a turnover between £90,000 and £10.2 million are required to pay for an ‘auditor’s report’, if they disapply the full audit requirements. No such requirements are placed on small companies, and it is not known what ‘lay audits’ and ‘auditors reports’ should look like in practice. We estimate that these requirements cost small societies over £1million a year for no discernible benefit.
- **Administrative frictions and costs**
 - HMRC currently provides a very poor service to newly formed societies. It lacks a process for providing a Unique Tax Reference and does not offer a digital interface for societies. Societies are excluded from beneficial Making Tax Digital developments, such as single account filing and automated registration with HMRC. When a society updates its registered address with the FCA, HMRC’s system does not update, and the online process HMRC provides for updating a business address does not countenance the existence of societies with a separate corporate register to Companies House. The free digital filing solution HMRC provides for small businesses (CATO) does not cater to societies.
 - Misleading labelling on Companies House of the status of societies that have converted from companies, as ‘Closed/Converted’, is a source of significant trouble. Third parties frequently incorrectly interpret this as signifying that they are no longer in business. A lack of automated process and lag time in registered societies being given a ‘company number’ sometimes holds back societies from being recognised by HMRC, delays eligibility for tax reliefs and creates difficulties in opening business bank accounts and in using digital services.
 - The policies and processes of local authorities and other public agencies often impede new societies. For example, we have heard from new community pubs that are unable to apply for liquor or other licences, because tick box options often don’t include the society legal form.
 - New societies can be refused access to an approved supplier list because of issues with due diligence processes. For similar reasons, societies can experience difficulties bidding for public and private contracts.
 - The policies and processes in private businesses, such as banks, digital service providers, credit reference agencies and those doing due diligence checks, can all unnecessarily impede or disadvantage new societies.
 - These problems often arise because private organisations will only refer to and use information on the Companies Register, will only accept a Companies Registration Number, or require things that societies simply cannot provide, such as Articles of association, Certificate of Incorporation, a Persons of Significant Control statement or up to date details of directors on register.

The more processes become digitised and automated, the bigger these problems become. It makes being a society harder than it needs to be. Societies are disadvantaged and the

perception that choosing a co-operative model is complicated and burdensome grows. The scale of these issues affecting societies is a strategic concern for Co-operatives UK.

Very welcome measures announced by the FCA in December 2025 to improve its registration function, have the potential to address some of these issues.

Companies and CICs

While new co-operative companies do not experience any of the challenges listed above, they do have to overcome the following:

- By default, the company and CIC legal forms do not facilitate co-operative features such as mutual purpose and democratic ownership and control. While it is possible to design-in these features, it is not straightforward. Neither Companies House nor the CIC Regulator offer model articles for co-operative companies that could make this process more accessible.
- Companies and CICs cannot easily crowdfund equity from the community, because the financial promotions exemptions under FSMA for non-transferable equity securities, do not apply to them. And while they can redeem or buyback shares, offering members a way to get capital out that is similar to withdrawal in a society, the legal requirements for company share redemption and buyback are more complicated.
- Co-operative companies and CICs with shares can struggle to be recognised as 'not-for-profit', or eligible for charitable and philanthropic funding
- New co-operative companies still face significant issues around accessing finance, because of personal guarantee requirements, and the fact that mainstream start-up finance and enterprise finance schemes (e.g. British Business Bank) do not cater to their purpose, ownership and governance model

Worker co-operatives

There are some particular factors that limit worker co-operative start-up:

- **Disincentives to founding a worker co-operative:** There are many rational reasons why workers or mission-driven business entrepreneurs may choose to establish a workers co-operative (e.g. ensure better pay and conditions for workers, improve productivity, increase resilience, achieve more). But there are also unnecessary and avoidable countervailing disincentives that could be reduced or removed altogether. Critically, employees in worker co-operatives cannot benefit from the tax free bonus that is available in EOT-owned companies. Unfortunately the EOT is a costly and complex structure that is ill-suited to start-up. Business Asset Disposal Relief also incentivises founders to grow a businesses and sell it in a way that is not compatible with the worker co-operative model. Additionally, worker co-operatives face real and perceived challenges in raising capital, which acts as a disincentive for more ambitious founders who require options for onward growth.
- **Awareness and culture:** The limited awareness of worker co-operatives particularly among workers and trade unions, acts as a barrier to early exploration of and adoption of the model. This is compounded by misperceptions of worker co-operatives as inefficient, inflexible or slow, despite evidence to the contrary on productivity, flexibility, lower management costs, resilience and propensity to achieve a degree of scale relative to new business generally. This means many people don't consider a worker or multi-stakeholder co-operative model, with perceptions of

complex and ineffective governance and management limiting exploration and adoption.

8. Are there industry or sector-specific barriers to starting a co-operative or non-financial mutual? Explain your answer.

You may wish to consider industries and sectors such as healthcare, energy, manufacturing, retail, and agriculture, and so on.

The most common sectors for co-operative formation in the last 5 years have been hospitality (17%), clubs and associations (15%) housing (13%), agriculture (9%) and retail (9%). The least common sectors have been manufacturing (1%), transport (1%), finance (1%) and health and social care (2%).

Manufacturing

The capital-intensive nature of manufacturing makes it a more challenging sector for co-operative start-up. Co-operative formations in manufacturing accounted for just 1% of new starts between 2021 and 2025. Only 1.1% of co-operatives overall are in manufacturing. That said, there are examples of successful co-operatives involved in manufacture that grew from start-up, such as Dulas and Delta-T, which prove it is possible.

Many of the co-operatives in manufacturing in the UK are the result of mutualisation, rather than start-up. This picture is common in other countries.

Financial services

Financial services are a very capital intensive sector to enter into, not least because of regulatory capital requirements. Most co-operatives in financial services are credit unions and are decades old.

New credit unions (the most common form of financial services co-operative in the UK) are rare. Furthermore, recent attempts to establish new regional mutual banks in the UK have stalled, mainly because pioneers found it impossible to raise the requisite CET1 capital. The most prominent pioneers attempted to use the co-operative society legal form, which currently lacks the legislative underpinning to issue equity to external investors on terms that can attract investment.

The Mutual Banking Association commissioned research to explore how the limited company legal form, which offers to required functionality in equity, could be used to incorporate a mutual bank, however we are not aware of a project to take this forward.

Beyond these legal constraints, pioneers identified challenges in attracting risk equity while offering 'mutual terms' (i.e. very limited influence in the business, social purpose over profit maximisation, steady long-term returns rather than high shorter-term yields).

Social care

Despite being a rare occurrence, we have supported a number of promising co-operative start-ups in care in the UK, created in response to crises in the care system. International evidence suggests that there is huge potential for co-operative growth and impact in care.

We have heard of numerous challenges to establishing a resilient care co-operative, including:

- Commissioning favouring larger providers backed by private investment that can offer lower costs, often at the expense of care quality, pay and conditions, while extracting

private and disguised profit from the system – issues co-operatives are explicitly formed to address

- Local government requiring a history of CQC registration, which no new entrant has, or access to significant capital, which new co-operatives struggle with in the UK, before awarding a care contract
- A need for finance to expand, in order to secure contracts and achieve a level of financial resilience in a very challenging market
- Rising people costs (NIC, National Living Wage) in a sector where people costs are already dominant and under-resourced

Housing

Despite housing being a notable growth area in recent years, we have heard from new housing co-operatives facing particular challenges in accessing finance, in addition to the challenges they face in raising external equity as a 'fully mutual' co-operative. We heard from housing co-operatives that they struggle to access loans, because of a regulatory regime that requires banks to treat loaning to housing co-operatives the same as loaning to businesses. This can produce the perverse outcome that a group of people seeking to buy a house together would be able to get a mortgage, but people choosing to buy a house through an asset locked democratic housing co-operative are unable to get the required loans. We believe Government needs to look at regulatory requirements on lenders seeking to lend to housing co-operatives, in order to better enable growth in the housing co-operative sector.

Community energy

As outlined earlier, the unpredictability in registering as a co-operative or community benefit society impacts all societies but has had particularly negative impacts on the community energy sector. Many community energy schemes have been forced to register as community benefit societies, preventing them from combining mutual benefit with community benefit, as they would optimally aim to do. Additionally, we have heard from some members that some law firms have recommended against incorporation as a society, or advised lenders against lending to community energy societies, because the unpredictability of the registrar can create issues with access to banking and finance, and put off potential commercial partners in the energy sector.

The community energy sector has also been harmed by the removal of EIS from investment in community energy schemes. This occurred because at the time the Feed-In-Tariff (FiT) worked to encourage community energy schemes to generate electricity and helped reduce the risk for investors by allowing long term revenue certainty, assuring a reasonable return for investors. However since the FiT was scrapped and replaced by the Smart Export Guarantee, the long term revenue certainty has been replaced by market volatility, and the tariff offered by energy suppliers may not offer any form of reasonable rate of return on investment. Additionally the SEG is designed for individual households selling excess energy and is not suitable for larger community energy schemes as it only applies to systems with generation capacity of less than 5MW. Therefore, we recommend that innovative start-up energy generators, especially community energy projects and other such schemes under the Local Power Plan, should be eligible for EIS on their share offers. This will help reduce risk and encourage private sector investment into community energy schemes, which is a key part of the Local Power Plan, which aims to support crowding in private capital to support new community energy schemes.

Growing and Sustaining

9. Is the rationale and process for growing a co-operative or non-financial mutual the same or different for growing a business which is not a co-operative or non-financial mutual?

Co-operatives in the UK have a greater propensity to achieve a degree of scale than UK businesses generally. For example, 35% of co-operatives employ more than 10 people compared with 19% of UK businesses overall. This is backed up by data from other countries (e.g. research of Virginie Pérotin). Small co-operatives in the UK appear more likely to have ambitions to develop than small businesses generally (e.g. survey data comparisons in 2021). Up to a point, the fundamental nature of the co-operative approach, enabling people to collaborate and pool resources, results in larger-than-average economic entities.

But too few co-operatives in the UK reach their potential, relative to what we see in some other countries (e.g. UK has lower turnover per co-operative, lower aggregate turnover as a % of GDP, lower GVA as a % of GDP, than in most G7 and many OECD member countries) because they struggle to respond to opportunities while retaining their purpose and structure.

There are differences in rationale for growing, but these vary between types of co-operative, depending on purpose, membership, structure and market context. In general, the primary rationale in a co-operative, will be the quantity and quality of growth required to maximise member value or social impact, rather than to achieve the maximum shareholder value that the market allows.

In general, in the UK and globally, co-operatives grow more carefully, purposefully and steadily than other growth-orientated businesses. But there is ample evidence that co-operatives can and do operate at all scales.

In some cases, the desired scale or impact can be achieved through conscious replication and federation (e.g. the 'strawberry patch' approach), or franchising, rather than through a single co-operative growing as big as the market allows. This is broadly known as 'secondary co-operation' and is a strategic enabler of co-operative strength in many countries.

In other cases desired scale or impact can be achieved through mergers between co-operatives, or by a co-operative acquiring a non-co-operative business.

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about growing and sustaining a co-operative or non-financial mutual:

growing and sustaining is too capital intensive for many co-operatives or non-financial mutuals

Neither agree or disagree. There is ample evidence globally of co-operatives operating at all scales, and of co-operatives raising significant amounts of capital to enable this. While co-operatives must take a distinctive approach to capital raising, the model is not intrinsically incapable of being capital intensive. And again, it is important to note that co-operatives have a greater propensity to achieve a degree of scale than businesses generally.

However, the legal, institutional and market conditions in the UK do not cater sufficiently to co-operative capital raising. For example, independent research by WPI Economics in 2023, found that the fastest growing co-operatives in the UK are also the most likely to be held

back by barriers to finance. This adds exogenous obstacles to co-operative business growth, particularly in more capital-intensive contexts.

it is too difficult for co-operatives or non-financial mutuals to meet the eligibility criteria for capital support

Neither agree or disagree. Depending on the support in question, it can often be more a matter of the design of schemes not catering to co-operatives, rather than eligibility, though in specific cases there can be an interaction between the two. For example, while the eligibility rules for the British Business Bank's Enterprise Capital and Patient Capital funds may not explicitly exclude co-operatives, these funds and delivery partners operate in ways that are not compatible with co-operative purpose, ownership and governance.

That said, many types of co-operatives are ineligible for government-backed social investment that is intended to finance social business growth. Additionally, we have heard from some members how a lack of scale prevents them from accessing loans and capital investment which further hinders their ability to scale effectively, producing a catch 22, where the lack of scale contributes to co-operatives being unable to access the support to grow.

it is too difficult to maintain co-operative and mutual principles at scale

Disagree. There is ample evidence globally of co-operatives operating at all scales, individually or as part of secondary networks. Co-operative governance and business practice continues to evolve to enable democratic member control and delivery of purpose at scale. Digital technology offers a way to facilitate member participation and governance at larger scales.

That said, many co-operatives with opportunities and ambitions to grow, tell us that one of the biggest challenges they face, is understanding how to grow purposefully and iterate effective co-operative culture and governance as they do so.

There is a paucity of best practice, training and expert advice to enable co-operative scaling in the UK.

DBT must understand that in many of the best examples around the world, scale and impact come from replication, franchising, federation and other forms of secondary co-operation, rather than a single co-operative entity growing large. Learning from stronger co-operative economies suggests that the development of effective 'secondary co-operatives', could be strategically critical to supporting scale and impact here. Through these structures, groupings of co-operatives can raise finance, co-invest, innovate, share costs, manage risks, facilitate peer support, provide mutual aid, and collaborate on projects and contracts. We recommend a strategic focus on developing secondary co-operatives in the UK.

co-operatives or non-financial mutuals looking to grow and sustain lack access to peer support networks

Agree, which is unfortunate as strong peer support networks are absolutely critical to enabling a thriving co-operative economy.

While there are some valuable peer networks in the UK, there is a lack of growth-focused peer support. This is due to the very limited resources available for co-operative development generally. As outlined earlier, Co-operatives UK runs a successful peer support service as part of our Business Support for Co-operatives programme. But we need an injection of funding to boost the provision of quality peer-to-peer learning in co-operative development, particularly around co-operative business growth.

With the School for Social Entrepreneurs, we helped run a cohort-based support programme (Growth and Resilience programme) to help existing co-operatives and social enterprise in West Yorkshire to develop and grow. It proved very successful, with the cohort-based method incorporating peer exchange and learning, highlighted as a particular value-add.

Some 'federal' sector bodies focused on specific sectors and types of co-operative, such as workers.coop (worker co-operatives), Confederation of Co-operative Housing, Radical Routes (housing and worker co-operatives) and Community Energy England have particular strengths in this area.

Worker co-operatives and their supporters in the UK also contribute to SolidFund, a solidarity fund by and for worker co-operatives. It was fully funded from within the worker co-operative community, incubated within Co-operatives UK, and its administration is now supported by Co-operative and Community Finance and workers.coop.

Mycelial Network is a promising network of community co-operatives and similar community-led organisations that own land and assets. It was funded into existence by Power to Change and JRF.

Because co-operatives are rare in the UK, they tend to lack comparable peers to learn from as they grow. For example, Suma the UK's largest worker co-operative, tells us that this has been a challenge for them. International knowledge exchange and peer learning for growing co-operatives could therefore be especially impactful, if it can be properly resourced. Co-operatives UK's role in connecting the UK with the international co-operative movement (e.g. via Co-operatives Europe and the International Co-operative Alliance) could be leveraged here.

Secondary co-operatives

In the most successful co-operative economies around the world, peer support extends to systems of secondary co-operation. Learning from stronger co-operative economies suggests that the development of effective 'secondary co-operatives', could be strategically critical to supporting scale and impact here. Through these structures, groupings of co-operatives can raise finance, co-invest, innovate, share costs, manage risks, facilitate peer support, provide mutual aid, and collaborate on projects and contracts. We recommend a strategic focus on developing secondary co-operatives in the UK.

co-operatives and non-financial mutuals do not know where to find clear, accessible guidance and advice on growing and sustaining

Strongly agree. The UK lacks supported pathways for co-operatives to grow. The UK's co-operative development ecosystem provides a range of advice, training and services that can aid growth, relating to governance, business strategy and finance raising. But there are gaps in this provision and limited expertise in key areas. And there are no specifically growth-focused support offers. This is primarily due to the very limited resources available for co-operative development.

co-operative or non-financial mutual founders often lack the necessary skills to grow and sustain

Neither agree or disagree. Skills issues can limit all businesses, and there is little intrinsic to co-operatives that makes this more of an issue for them.

The involvement of a range of stakeholders in governance and decision-making, even in small or early-stage co-operatives, can be an advantage. This is because it can add a range

of knowledge and skills that small business owners often do not have and cannot easily access.

However, research by WPI Economics has found that smaller co-operatives founded by volunteers or people with limited business experience, may need support to identify and respond to market opportunities, and to set growth strategies.

11. Are there unique barriers to growing and sustaining a co-operative or non-financial mutual which other types of business don't face? Explain your answer.

You may wish to consider barriers to accessing capital, market share, business support and investment, public awareness, or competition with other types of business.

In the 2016 Co-op Census, the most commonly selected barrier affecting success by co-operatives was wider economic conditions, including competition. Today, we are aware through our work with our members, that the cost of business, including high and/or volatile cost of inputs, property, energy, digital, cyber security, crime, business rates and staff costs including NIC and RLW, are serious challenges. For the many co-operatives that are predominantly 'bricks and mortar' businesses, disruptions and changes in consumer behaviour, (especially post-COVID) coupled with unfair competition with online business, are also a major challenge. For some co-operatives, especially in agriculture, manufacture and digital, ongoing uncertainty, disruption and frictions in international trade, are also a major challenge.

While these challenges are not distinctive to co-operatives, the makeup of the UK co-operative sector can give these challenges a particular pertinence. The UK sector is largely made up of 'bricks and mortar' businesses in retail and hospitality, and by agricultural co-operatives engaged in global supply chains.

Furthermore, the ability of co-operatives to respond to these challenges can be hampered by barriers that are more unique to their model.

For example, the distinctive challenges co-operatives face in accessing finance, are the biggest barrier to their growth, as these limit their ability to:

- respond to opportunities, threats and challenges
- invest in new products, innovations and technology
- diversify
- acquire other businesses
- invest in replication, franchising, federation and other secondary co-operation
- Compete with investor back firms engaging in blitzscaling, willing to operate at a loss to grow

There is also a lack of growth-focused advice, training and peer support. There is also a lack of established best practice on growing a co-operative business.

Altogether, this amounts to a lack of clear, supported pathways for co-operative scaling in the UK, relative to other business forms. In 2022, 90% of surveyed Scottish co-operatives said they needed 'scale up' support to be better-tailored to their model, purpose and values.

Scaling up is also challenged by a lack of co-operative accounting standards, as current accounting frameworks designed for investor-owned firms misrepresent co-operative capital, making viable co-operatives look over-leveraged and higher risk than they are in reality.

Procurement also operates as a barrier to co-operatives. The small and local scale of many co-operatives, mean they miss out public contracts. We know Co-operative Councils Innovation network that some councils sometimes overlook co-operatives for contracts as the society legal form isn't as widely understood as companies. We have also heard from members that the Procurement Act which still focuses on best value, leads local authorities to prioritise lowest cost, over public value, causing more contracts going to larger national providers, who are able price out smaller local businesses like co-operatives, hindering their ability to grow. Additionally, the current procurement framework focuses on traditional contracting over co-design and partnership, which is where co-operatives are able to add real value to service delivery. To tackle this Government needs to require local authorities to consider co-operatives and mutuals when procuring, and place emphasis on reducing profit extraction, increasing public value, co-design and co-delivery within public services, not just lowest price.

We have long heard from a range of co-operatives that a huge barrier they face is a lack of awareness amongst the public, investors, local authorities and civil servants. This creates a huge barrier for co-operatives, in getting legislation that reflects the specifics of co-ops, or winning contracts or gaining investment or attracting members and customers. Therefore, we believe Government should invest to ensure co-operatives and social businesses are on the curriculum for business studies. We see no reason why those choosing to study business shouldn't be taught about alternative forms of businesses like co-operatives. While ensuring co-operatives are on the curriculum is not itself able to deliver the scale of co-operative growth needed, it would have a deeper long term impact on social awareness.

12. Do different types of co-operatives and non-financial mutuals face different barriers to growing and sustaining? Explain your answer.

You may wish to consider consumer, worker, producer, multi-stakeholder and community co-operatives, as well as trusts, clubs and societies, and direct or indirect employee-owned businesses.

Worker co-operatives

Worker co-operatives do not have the same advantages in crowdfunding member capital that consumer and community co-operatives have. And they must take a distinctive approach to raising equity from non-members that is not well-catered for in the UK. This could be addressed through the development of specialist financing institutions within the sector, with support from the British Business Bank and social investment wholesalers and impact investors, and by society law reform.

Worker co-operatives face challenges around developing their governance and management structures as they grow. This can be especially challenging for single site businesses, who often opt against expansion into new areas, due to complexities in how to maintain their governance over multiple sites. These can be overcome, but quality advice and peer support, and investments in digital, are needed to do so.

Worker co-operatives currently also face a barrier in fairly rewarding their staff for their labour. Current tax law treats patronage refunds offered by consumer co-ops as tax free however a return of profits to members of a worker co-op in an equitable manner in relation to hours worked is treated as taxable income through PAYE and carries employer contributions to NI. This carries the inherent unfairness that owners of a company limited by shares can choose to pay themselves mostly through dividends which are taxed at a lower

rate of income tax than if worker co-ops were to do the same. We believe this needs to be addressed.

Meanwhile bonuses paid to all employees in an EOT-owned company are exempt from income tax. One way to address the above, and address a clear unfairness, would be to extend this relief to bonuses paid by worker co-operatives as well.

Worker co-operatives also find it hard to grow due to negative perceptions, they can be viewed as slow and inefficient due to misconceptions on governance which affects lender confidence.

Consumer co-operatives

The UK's long-established consumer co-operatives have opportunities to expand and innovate in convenience retail, while also to diversify to deliver and enable other 'in-person' services and activities that meet community needs, including co-location of services and things like housing, childcare, pharmacy and social infrastructure.

They also have opportunities to innovate and invest in digital, to drive ethical uses of data, offer ethical digital-backed services, and increase volume in both food and allied businesses.

However, to do this they will need to overcome the following challenges distinctive to their model:

- barriers raising capital to make the required investments
- fierce competition from better-funded businesses that undercut them on ethical, social and environmental standards

Community co-operatives

Some community co-operatives have limited motivation or intent to develop beyond an initial project. However, there is significant untapped potential for many to build on initial successes and asset bases, to diversify and grow. The long-term economic and social value in encouraging and enabling this, would be significant.

However, there is an absence of tailored support, finance and pathways that would enable them to do so. Government should work with the sector to address this.

As most community co-operatives are registered societies, burdens and limitations in society law, and unnecessary barriers to accessing funding, are a challenge for onward development. Furthermore community benefit societies with charitable status in England and Wales face unnecessary barriers in accessing finance and support they should be eligible for, because they don't have charity numbers.

Social clubs

There also remains a distinct lack of tailored business support for social clubs, which many need to invest in the skills and capacity of the volunteers who run the nation's social clubs, to ensure that a new generation of community leaders are ready to take the social club movement into the 21st century.

The social club movement has also long been locked out of traditional finance sometimes to a greater extent than other co-operative businesses. Clubs face structural barriers to grants, loans, and capital investment, often because of outdated constitutions or unrecognised legal forms. New funding approaches such as government-backed loans, council support or sponsorship partnerships, must include social clubs, treating them as genuine community assets rather than simply as small businesses.

The current licencing framework can add complex barriers to social clubs and community owned pubs. We believe government should explore creating a distinct licence category for "community social clubs" that might carry reduced fees and lighter compliance requirements, reducing the burden on clubs and making them more economically sustainable.

13. Are there industry-specific barriers faced by co-operatives and non-financial mutuals when trying to grow and sustain? Explain your answer

Platform co-operatives

Platform co-operatives provide goods or services primarily through democratically owned and controlled digital platforms (website, mobile app, or protocol) for mutual and communal benefit. In recent years we have seen some promising start-ups in the UK and globally covering data, delivery, holiday lets, BSL interpretation, social care, taxis, agriculture, local food and more.

Between 2018 and 2023, Co-operatives UK ran four 'accelerator' support programmes for groups exploring or working towards becoming platform co-operatives. UnFound supported a total of 26 groups between 2018 and 2023. Circa 25-30% (exact figure uncertain) of the 26 groups supported are still developing as co-operatives. Some projects have continued, but not as co-operatives. As with new ventures in general, most have stalled altogether.

Through delivering UnFound, we have concluded that with targeted outreach to the 'social tech' and 'tech for good' communities, is possible to engage many potential founders of platforms who are exploring different options for building their business / solution. The biggest challenge comes not in encouraging platform co-operatives to start, but in creating the conditions for these co-operatives to scale.

Success as a platform business generally depends on attracting and retaining users. Having enabling, user-friendly and scalable technology is essential at a very early stage, but requires capital to procure or develop. The maintenance and iteration of digital platforms, to ensure they remain up-to-date and competitive, also requires funding. However, the cost of tech is not the only, or even the most significant, factor here. Co-operatives often compete against venture capital-backed platforms that absorb enormous losses as part of rapid growth and market domination strategies. Where platform co-operatives can combine with the right kinds of patient, impact focused capital, they demonstrate a different way of developing digital infrastructure that is more responsible, collaborative, accountable and oriented to social impact.

Based on our experience and research by Euricse (*Mapping platform cooperatives: identities, dimensions and challenge*) the most significant barrier to growth in platform co-operatives, is a lack of good finance options, both to enable well-capitalised start-ups that are set up to grow, and then to fund that growth.

In our view, specialist institutional investment with the ability to make higher-risk investments to fund the start-up and growth of promising platform co-operatives, could be a gamechanger.

Creating a co-operative spin-out route for grant-funded innovations in academia, offers a further way to fund high-potential co-operatives. For example, Read Co-op is a multi-national AI-enabled platform co-operative comprised of 200+ leading universities and archives in 30+ countries, that supports archivists, academics and researchers to transcribe and work with historical documents. The co-operative was formed as a way to 'spin-out' a

successful grant-funded AI innovation, while ensuring high levels of value for, and accountability to, the institutions that created it.

Enabling more secondary co-operation in the platform space, including shared platform infrastructure, could also enable growth. For example, CoopCycle is a multi-national co-operative that enables local rider-owned co-operatives via a white label platform solution, including three bike delivery co-operatives in the UK.

Other digital infrastructure

Beyond platforms there are opportunities for communities, businesses, civil society and public bodies to use a 'neutral thin layer' co-operative model to develop and share digital infrastructure such as fibre, 5G and data centres. This model reduces the friction and cost in 'B2B' collaboration, enabling efficient co-investment and co-management, while avoiding unsustainable over-build. The best example in the UK currently is Co-operative Network Infrastructure (CNI), a successful co-operative comprised of public bodies, large and SME broadband providers and civil society organisations. CNI has relied on member capital contributions to become established. To reach its full potential, CNI believes that it would need access to new sources of patient and co-operative-friendly growth capital.

Housing

We reaffirm as outlined earlier that housing co-operatives struggle to access finance to grow, not only due to their fully mutual status but also because lenders treat them as riskier than a mortgage to an individual due to regulatory requirements on lending to corporate entities. Plus, Stamp Duty and Land and Building Transaction Tax surcharges, levied on property acquisitions by not-for-profit housing co-operatives, add costs to any possible expansion.

Housing co-ops also face barriers, from the fact the law treats co-op membership as separate from the tenancy agreement. This is a particular challenge for housing co-ops after the Mexfield case, which meant in some circumstances, a housing co-op could struggle to evict a tenant who has ceased to be a member, which adds serious complexities to co-op governance. Therefore, we echo calls from the Confederation of Co-operative Housing, for the Government to legislate for a specific, co-op housing tenure, which would ensure those dwelling in a housing co-op do so by virtue of their membership of the co-operative. This would recognise the relationship of member and the housing co-operative rather than the current system which creates a tenant-landlord relationship.

Public services

Co-operatives in the community leisure, social care and other public services, are held back by policy and practice in public procurement. Outside of a small number of cases, public procurement does not encourage co-design and partnership with the co-operative sector but rather focuses too much on securing the lowest price in large contracts with private providers. This acts as a particular barrier to co-operatives, as by their nature, they are built around partnership and collaboration.

Agriculture

We have heard from agricultural co-operatives that barriers holding back their development include:

- limited understanding, exploration and utilisation of co-operation in UK farming industry, relative to other advanced economies
- limited promotion of, support for, and utilisation of, co-operatives in Defra's support schemes

- issues with inappropriate treatment of co-operatives in some, but not all, fair contract regulations
- uncertainty about future of support for producer organisations and collaboration more widely
- uncertainty about competition exemptions post-Brexit
- challenges accessing finance

We strongly recommend that the recently announced Defra Farmer Collaboration Fund supports existing agricultural co-operatives to innovate, develop, and maximise their impact.

Community energy

We have heard from the community energy sector a range of challenges:

- *Limitations in current energy market:* Barriers to community energy societies directly supplying their members through the national grid, has added to the unpredictability of the registrar, as members don't directly transact with the core business of the society. This forces inadequate trade-offs between mutual and community benefit.
- *Lack of specialist support:* We have also heard from the community energy sector, that setting up community energy projects can be particularly challenging requiring specialist support both for governance, capacity building, targeted support for shared ownership sites as well as technology development. Additionally, many community energy co-ops are trying to invest in delivering but current government policy separates energy generation from retrofit, hampering ability to build truly successful sustainable energy societies.
- *Siloed working in government:* Community energy sector also faces challenges from the fact that as businesses they need support from DBT, have legislative challenges overseen by HMT, while they deal primarily with DESNZ and GBE for the Local Power Plan.

Mutualisation

15. What do you think the impact would be of more businesses mutualising?

You may wish to consider:

- *short, medium, and long-term implications of increased conversion into a co-operative or mutual model*
- *the potential impact on individual businesses (such as performance, resilience, employee engagement) and on the wider economy (such as productivity, innovation, regional development)*
- *any risks, challenges, or unintended consequences that might arise*

Cite evidence where possible.

The exact impacts will depend on the type of mutualisation (e.g. transition to community ownership, employee ownership etc). The strongest evidence relates to the impact of more transitions to employee ownership (or multi-stakeholder mutuality involving employee ownership), from *Exploring the Potential of the Employee Ownership Business Model* by WPI Economics. These benefits would be:

- improved labour productivity
- improved worker wellbeing
- more businesses paying fair wages
- more businesses offering non-financial and wellbeing-related benefits to workers
- improved firm resilience
- more investment in people and progression

While all EOB models are more likely to provide a greater range of policies supporting employee health and wellbeing than non-EOBs, worker co-operatives are the most likely to have policies such as taking a career break or sabbatical (60%); providing flexibility in contracted hours (93%); having a 'right to disconnect' policy in place (47%); and implementation of remote or hybrid working (93%).

Since adopting the model, worker co-operatives are also the most likely to have increased their focus on environmental sustainability issues and given back to the local community. Worker co-operatives are also the most likely to have 50%+ of their suppliers as small and medium sized businesses, and voluntary, community or social enterprises.

Beyond the WPI research, the Leibniz Information Centre for Economics has published an academic study into strategic divergence and convergence between worker buyouts and conventional enterprises. Researchers found that worker owned firms created from mutualisation operated much like conventional firms in many areas, but are more likely to focus on technological upgrading of equipment, digitisation, product innovation and production flexibility. Worker owned firms post buyout are also more likely to focus on employee engagement, preserving jobs, and social and environmental impact. The researchers concluded that worker owned firms were particularly *"capable of reconciling economic imperatives with social objectives"*.

16. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

there is a lack of awareness of co-operative and mutual models among business leaders

Strongly agree. While planned succession to employee ownership using the EOT model has become markedly more common in the past decade, because of the employee buyout CGT relief, it is still uncommon relative to the number of business sales and closures each year. Had it not been for the CGT relief, it is likely that far fewer SME owners would have become aware of the exit option, let alone chosen it.

Awareness of how to optimise employee voice in the EOT model is more limited. This could become problematic as more former owners are paid out and cease to have a role in EOT governance, leaving employees as the sole beneficiary group. There is evidence to suggest that empowering employees in democratic governance and ensuring leadership is accountable to employees, is important in maximising the benefits in the ownership model.

Furthermore, awareness of other mutualisation options is very low, including:

- planned succession using a worker co-operative model
- employee-initiated buyouts
- co-operative restarts, wherein workers and/or communities form a co-operative to acquire assets from a liquidating business and keep trading

- worker co-operative conglomerates, wherein businesses are acquired by a co-operatively structured group that is owned and controlled by the workers in these businesses, for example Obran Co-operative in the USA
- mutualisation of charities and social enterprise, wherein these organisations adopt a democratic membership and governance structure, often empowering beneficiaries, employees and volunteers. A particularly promising route involves traditional charities becoming charitable community benefit societies
- mutualisation of mission-led businesses (with customers, employees and other stakeholders offered democratic membership alongside investors)
- customer-led mutualisation
- mutualisation of previously privately owned natural monopolies (e.g. water, rail), generally empowering service users, employees and civil society stakeholders
- mutualisation within the public sector, including creating or restructuring public bodies so that they are governed and operate as mutuals, generally empowering service users, employees and civil society stakeholders

there aren't enough visible success stories of businesses that have mutualised

Neither agree nor disagree. There are plenty of well published success stories of mutualisation, especially in relation to employee ownership transition but they receive too little attention from mainstream business discourse, media and advisors. The ongoing lack of professional understanding, limited societal awareness and gaps in education and training covering co-operatives, means success stories are not as visible as they should be.

It will take more resources than currently available for awareness raising, outreach, education, and training, to significantly move the dial here.

there's not enough clear information or advice on how to mutualise

We strongly agree. It is rare for advice for existing businesses to cover mutualisation, and even rarer for information on mutualisation options to be proactively shared within the business community. Yet where this has been done in a sustained way, including specifically raising awareness and targeting business owners looking towards retirement, as done by Scottish Enterprise and more recently by Welsh Government-funded Employee Ownership Wales, mutualisation has become markedly more common. In Wales alone we have seen the number of employee-owned business more than double in just the last Senedd term alone.

Information and advice on mutualisation beyond planned employee ownership succession using the EOT is particularly lacking in the UK.

there are many reasons why businesses mutualise

Strongly agree. In the UK the most common reasons tend to be SME founder-owners exiting while wanting to secure future of the business they have built, while also benefiting from the CGT relief. However, in some cases, other reasons will include employees wanting to secure their livelihoods, a business they are passionate about and skills they have developed, or a local community wanting to retain an amenity or service, when these are otherwise threatened by owner exit or business closure.

the process to mutualise is complex

Agree. Though with the right advice, legal framework and finance in place, it is not necessarily more complicated than some other business transactions (e.g. merger, management buyout).

One of the key challenges and complexities to overcome in employee, community or customer-led mutualisation, is the need to organise, form a co-operative and raise finance in a short period of time. Legal rights to information, time and preferential bidding, can reduce this complexity and challenge. If combined with suitable financing options and co-operative development, the new 'Community Right to Buy' in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, will certainly enable more community-led mutualisation of businesses and business assets to occur.

We also recommend government creates employee rights that increase scope for workers to arrange acquisition of a business or business assets, comparable with the law in France obliging firms to inform employees of their intention to sell, and employee right of first refusal on the assets of insolvent businesses in Italy.

We note that DBT does not ask about the financing of mutualisation. A lack of tailored financing solutions makes mutualisation more difficult and complex than it is in some other countries, such as Italy, France and Spain. In the UK, planned ownership succession is mostly funded through vendor finance, with a small but growing role played by boutique external investment in some cases. This limits the number of potentially viable mutualisations considerably, while also leaving employees with ongoing financial obligations to former owners that can last many years

Specialist institutions and arrangements in Italy, France and Spain empower workers to raise patient and flexible finance (sourced from other co-operatives, private investors and the state) in a timely manner to put together effective bids for businesses or business assets. We recommend government establishes a Growth and Mutualisation Fund to crowd patient capital into mutual transitions (e.g. worker ownership transitions), as well as into growing and growth-oriented co-operatives. Our proposal for Common Capital Tax Relief, wherein co-operatives are supported to transfer some of their surpluses into development funds would also help to finance this (see question 26)

there is a lack of awareness of co-operative or mutual models by employees

Strongly agree. The pathway and ecosystem for planned employee ownership succession in the UK (i.e. the EOT model, the CGT relief, the financing options, the professional advice) is very much built around the owner, directors and senior management. We are aware of too many employee ownership transitions in which the employees are only informed of the transition at the last minute.

Trade unions and other convenors of employees in the UK are yet to engage in a significant way with employee ownership as an option for supporting their members. In countries with more employee-initiated buyouts and restarts, such as France, unions have an important role in helping to educate and organise workers, to enable mutualisation.

the landscape is too complicated for businesses wanting to mutualise

Agree. While the surge in employee ownership suggests the standard planned succession pathway has been working very well for many SMEs, there is evidence to suggest that the cost and complexity involved in the EOT model, makes transitioning smaller businesses, and lower value businesses in foundational sectors, uneconomical.

The fact that the current CGT relief only applies when the EOT vehicle is used, when a low cost and simple worker co-operative vehicle is also suitable for employee ownership, is a complicating factor.

Furthermore, the EOT model does not enable mutualisation that empowers and benefits service users or communities. Having CGT relief applied to just one legal model and form of

mutualisation, does nothing to enable mutualisation involving and benefiting other stakeholders.

there are insufficient incentives to encourage businesses to mutualise

Strongly agree. It is too early to say whether the reduction in the CGT relief for employee buyouts from 100% to 50% results in an insufficient incentive. But it is clear that there are insufficient incentives for:

- employee buyouts using the worker co-operative model
- selling assets to a co-operative as part of a co-operative re-start
- selling a business to a co-operative conglomerate
- selling a business, share of a business, or assets to a community co-operative, to a consumer co-operative, or to a multi-stakeholder co-operative

We recommend that government continues the CGT for employee buyouts, while expanding eligibility to also advantage use of the worker co-operative model for employee buyouts.

We also recommend expanding the CGT relief to include:

- profits from sale of business assets to an asset locked community co-operative in a 'community buyout'. This would provide a strong incentive to owners to sell to the community and would strengthen the impact of the new Community Right to Buy legislation. This is important because at present Business Asset Disposal Relief doesn't incentivise mutualisation. There is no relief if the business founder converts it into a society and the current relief encourages sale to highest bidder, a targeted relief alongside the new Community Right to Buy could see a rise in number of new community businesses.
- sale of controlling stake in a business, or business assets, to a co-operative of customers / service users

17. If you have de-mutualised, can you explain why you did this and how the process went?

We are aware of cases where significant appreciation in the value of property owned by a co-operative (such as land, housing or a social club premises) create a perverse incentive for members to demutualise an otherwise effective co-operative. This can be more likely in long-established co-operatives where the current generation of members have inherited the co-operative and its assets. The process can sometimes be driven by outside agents seeking to acquire the co-operative's property at lower prices. Where these demutualisations occur, current members gain financially from the 'common capital' of the co-operative, usually against the explicit intentions of those who founded the co-operative and built up the assets.

We strongly recommend that government legislates to give co-operative societies more options for legally guaranteeing their 'common capital', such as a statutory asset lock, non-distributable capital surplus or indivisible reserve. These would remove the incentives to demutualise in order to gain from inherited common wealth. Additionally, we believe society law should be amended to give societies the power to entrench certain provisions of their rules, similar to that which exists within the Companies Act. This would be a further tool for founders to ensure their co-operative is not demutualised for the wrong reasons.

We know some businesses have explored demutualisation because of barriers faced by Companies House upon their conversion into a registered society. When a company

converts into a society, its listing on Companies House says 'closed/converted' and the business instead gets a new listing on the mutuals register and the associated stub on Companies House. This leaves the same legal entity with 3 different pages, its society page on the Mutuals Register, its associated stub on Companies House and its old company page on Companies House which now says 'closed/converted'. This can produce many issues for the new society, such as losing access to their bank account due to confusion over whether the entity is still trading, banks and creditors see the listing on Companies House saying 'closed/converted' and assume the entity has ceased trading. This could be resolved though by ensuring that a company that has converted is accurately listed, its old page on Companies House should state that the entity has now converted into a society and you can find the most recent accounts on the Mutuals Register. This would reduce confusion by confirming to those looking at the company that the society is a legal continuation of the same entity and it hasn't closed.

Businesses sometimes explore demutualisation in order to access capital that they otherwise currently struggle to access due to legal, market and institutional barriers.

Other demutualisation's occur when co-operatives have been 'captured' by a group within the membership. We recommend that government legislates to strengthen the rights of members of registered societies to organise and act when such capture occurs.

Partial demutualisation sometimes occurs when a co-operative sells part of its business to a non-mutual buyer.

Business support and advice

24. Is there enough tailored support for co-operatives and non-financial mutuals?

No. Mainstream business support and established pathways act as a barrier to exploration, adoption and growth. Meanwhile the co-operative development ecosystem is under-resourced for both 'pre-technical' development (target outreach, supported exploration of options) and 'technical' support (business modelling, growth strategy, organisational structure, governance, finance).

The ecosystem is also overly fragmented, being largely comprised of independent consultants and small agencies, as well as advisors employed by a small number of sector bodies like Plunkett UK, Co-operatives UK, Cwmpas and SAOS. Using our Business Support for Co-op programme as a foundation, Co-operatives UK is working with co-operative development bodies to improve coordination of the national network, so that it can be a ready delivery partner in local and national programmes, with more consistent quality across regions. We are also encouraging and supporting local co-operative networks to be more organised and engaged in the co-operative growth agenda. In some places, such as West Midlands and West Yorkshire, a complementary partnership between local and national provision, is starting to bear fruit.

The ecosystem also suffers from a limited supply of deep experience and expertise in specialist areas. We have a strong network of specialist Community Shares practitioners who are key to the strength of the community ownership pathway, not least in enabling responsible use of the Community Shares financing model, underpinned by robust Community Shares Standards (see question 26). Though this needs resourcing to be maintained and grown. But expertise in areas such as social care, agriculture, mutualisation, scaling, secondary co-operation and finance raising beyond community shares, is very limited.

There is also a lack of diversity among co-operative development advisors, in terms of ethnicity, cultural background, socio-economic background and lived experience. This can create challenges when it comes to engaging and supporting non-white ethnicities, working class communities and people struggling with multiple disadvantages in contexts of deprivation. Addressing these challenges is especially important in 'pre-technical' development.

Funding

There is currently a funding crisis for co-operative development across the UK.

In England, the sector relies significantly on its own resources for development. For example, for a decade the Co-operative Bank has been the sole funder of our Business Support for Co-ops programme. This programme has supported half of all the co-operatives that have formed since 2018 and has been critical in sustaining the co-operative development ecosystem. Meanwhile large consumer co-operatives (The Co-op, Our Co-op, Southern Co-operative, Scotmid, East of England Co-operative, Lincolnshire Co-operative, Channel Islands Co-operative, Heart of England Co-operative, Radstock Co-operative, Tamworth Co-operative, Allendale Co-operative) have made significant contributions to the funding of sector bodies including Co-operatives UK, Plunkett UK and local co-operative development bodies. This has been enough to enable limited outreach and awareness raising and a rationed offer of business support. It has not been enough to build strong development pathways for start-up and growth outside of community ownership. Nor has it enabled the professional development of advisors to strengthen expertise and specialisms.

Between 2016 and 2024 National Lottery funding, via Power to Change, helped fund access to Community Shares practitioners and the Community Shares Standards system (see our answer to question 26). Between 2023 and 2026, dormant assets funding via Access has done the same, through invaluable Booster Development Grants. This funding comes to an end in March 2026 and there is no certainty as to what comes next.

In Wales and Scotland, governments have consistently funded co-operative development for more than a decade, mainly focused on community co-operative start-ups, and this has resulted in markedly higher start-up rates per capita relative to England and Northern Ireland. However, in recent years funding for co-operative development in Scottish Enterprise has been significantly reduced, with the start-up rate falling as a result.

From 2022-2025, there was a notable uptick in funding under the Levelling Up agenda, via the Community Ownership Fund and in some places using UK Shared Prosperity Fund (e.g. West Yorkshire). However, this funding is ending and at present nothing comparable is replacing it.

The inclusion of co-operative development in many Local Growth Plans across England, along with recent initiatives to fund Growth Hubs to support co-operative development, are very hopeful. And major government initiatives such as Pride in Place and the Local Power Plan have huge potential to stimulate demand and increase resources for co-operative development in the years to come. Though this will require proactive work with the sector to ensure co-operative options are firmly 'on the menu', accessible, and supported in both Pride in Place and the Local Power Plan.

Co-operative development practitioners are expressing concerns about a funding cliff edge after March 2026. The end of funded proactive co-operative development will result in both a shrinking pipeline of demand, and a lack of accessible support for what demand remains. This puts the support ecosystem itself at risk, as providers are forced to consider

redundancies and/or orienting away from co-operative development. The period from March 2026 could be damaging and may put future delivery at risk.

We believe there is a strong case for government adding public resources to what the sector already does for itself. Crucially, impactful co-operative development requires stable multi-year funding, with strong theories of change and KPIs that reflect how co-operatives develop, over what time frames, and toward what impacts.

Supply and demand

Pre-technical development (targeted outreach, supported exploration of options) is critical in helping more people explore co-operative options when relevant to do so. But it has been chronically under-resourced in the UK. The exceptions to this, such as proactive outreach by Co-operative Development Scotland (Scottish Enterprise) in its best years, the work of Community Shares Wales, the UnFound platform co-operative accelerator, the impact of the Community Ownership Fund, and the West Midlands Ownership Hub, all suggest it is possible to stimulate a significant amount of latent demand in target groups.

In some parts of the sector, such as community ownership, housing, energy and retrofit, there is strong existing momentum, and growing interest in co-operative solutions among potential adopters and those who advise them. While this helps to maintain potential demand for tailored start-up support, the level of actual demand is still dependent on there being resourced 'pre-technical' activity (e.g. targeted outreach, supported exploration of options) and the presence of an attractive 'technical' support offer.

In other potential growth areas, such as agriculture, social care and worker co-operatives in digital and everyday sectors, visibility and awareness of co-operative options is low. Effective 'pre-technical' activity, and the presence of an attractive 'technical' support offer, are even more critical to stimulating demand for tailored start-up support.

At the current low levels of pre-technical activity, there is enough capacity in the development ecosystem to meet current levels of demand for tailored support. However this obscures:

- significant reliance on a small pool of experienced expert advisors
- high risk that any marked uptick in demand, for example stimulated by Pride in Place, the Local Power Plan, Farmer Collaboration Fund or Local Growth Plans, will quickly outstrip the supply of high-quality support
- limited capacity to support development in more specialist areas

Demand among existing co-operatives for tailored support varies, and we believe is heavily dependent on the presence of an attractive and accessible support offer. The 2016 Co-op Census found that most existing co-operatives relied on their own knowledge, experience and research to inform development, and if they did access outside support were far more likely to use non-co-operative consultants and professionals.

Yet 24% of Business Support for Co-op clients in 2025 were existing organisations. A targeted support offer for existing co-operatives within the Business for Good West Yorkshire programme (called Growth and Resilience), was very successful. It demonstrated both demand for, and the positive impacts of, tailored growth-focused support. Meanwhile 458 of our c1,000 members paid for advice or training in 2025, again demonstrating potential demand for tailored support among existing co-operatives.

Research by WPI Economics and others has identified a clear need for more co-operatives to be receiving high-quality advice, support and training to enable growth. In our view, demand for this can be stimulated by the availability of attractive, accessible and tailored

offerings. But the supply of growth-oriented advice and expertise would also need to be grown in response to any rise in demand.

Coordination and delivery

We welcome the increase in public funding for co-operative development via England's Growth Hubs in 2025-26, which has come as many Local Growth Plans include co-operative, mutual and social economy development. The opportunities to encourage, fund and deliver co-operative development in hundreds of local Pride in Place areas, is very exciting. All this builds on the 2022-25 UKSPF period, in which some local funding was allocated to co-operative development (e.g. in West Yorkshire through Business for Good West Yorkshire).

But our recent experience of the implementation of local publicly-funded co-operative development, often within wider social economy support, has highlighted significant challenges that need to be overcome.

For example, very little of the millions that on paper were allocated toward co-operative development in UKSPF investment plans, were actually spent to enable co-operative development.

Too often, stated policy to include co-operative development does not translate into the commissioning and delivery of support that encourages or caters to co-operatives. Local authorities and Growth Hubs often do not effectively commission co-operative development within broader social economy development contracts. And too often, commissions lack a strong theory of change that identifies particular co-operative types, sectors and target groups, linked to desired outcomes and impacts, with explicit co-operative development KPIs. And where a credible delivery partner with co-operative specialisms does not come forward, authorities too often contract social economy support partners that are ill-equipped to deliver co-operative development outcomes.

The experience has also revealed the need to significantly enhance coordination in the co-operative development ecosystem, so that it can become a ready delivery partner for local and national government. Co-operatives UK is working to do this, using Business Support for Co-ops as a foundation.

In some regions (e.g. West Midlands) local co-operative networks are a ready partner to inform local priorities, programme design and to help deliver. In others, networks are less developed or do not exist. We strongly encourage strategic and local authorities to involve, nurture and partner with these networks.

In 2025-26 a number of Growth Hubs have opted to train their advisors on co-operatives, which we think is essential. However, we have also found examples where Growth Hubs have begun promoting co-operative options using inaccurate information and messaging. And many Growth Hubs have opted to fund broader social enterprise support, without seeming to target co-operative development outcomes explicitly. Co-operatives UK is eager to help the Growth Hub network to strengthen its role in growing our sector.

If a landscape of devolved funding and varied policy and practice across strategic authorities, Growth Hubs and Pride in Place areas, is going to deliver co-operative growth, then a stronger layer of national coordination is going to be essential. This includes coordination among co-operative development providers, and between them and the public sector. A greater degree of coordination and joint commissioning of co-operative development activities among strategic authorities, Growth Hubs and Pride in Place areas, could also be very beneficial.

In our experience, unless strategic authorities, lead local authorities and Growth Hubs are explicitly required to allocate some business support funding to enable co-operative growth, there is a high risk that they will not do so.

The long-term objective should be to strengthen the sector's own developmental ecosystem, nationally and locally. Government could support the sector to build and seed fund its own development institutions for long-term impact. These could then be even stronger delivery partners for the local and national state.

We recommend:

- **Business support:** Central government should require, encourage, support and resource strategic authorities, local authorities and Growth Hubs in England to develop and commission ambitious multi-year co-operative development initiatives, in partnership with the local, regional and national sector, targeted at the best opportunities for growth and impact. It should also encourage and support Welsh and Scottish governments to do the same. Co-operative UK's Business Support for Co-ops programme, currently funded nationally by the Co-operative Bank, with some local funding partners (e.g. West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Islington Borough Council) offers an already-operational way to plug a coordinated national network of experts into development initiatives.
- **Strengthening the support ecosystem:** Using Business Support for Co-ops as the foundation, the national provider network must become a ready delivery partner for local and national programmes. Central government and the sector should co-fund further coordination and ongoing improvement of the national provider network, including an efficient contracting and programme management hub, the facilitation of specialist practitioner groupings, development of practical resources to enhance support, continuous professional development and quality assurance for advisors. As demand increases, training programmes will be needed to grow the pool of specialist advisors. It should also encourage and support Welsh and Scottish governments to work with co-operatives and sector bodies in their nations, to build their development infrastructure.
- **Onward development and scaling:** Strategic authorities and central government should co-fund a multi-regional pilot to support existing co-operatives with ambitions to diversify, scale-up or replicate/franchise, with specialist advice, peer exchange and access to finance.
- **Mutualisation:** Strategic authorities and central government should co-fund a multi-regional pilot to establish a pathway for worker-led buyouts and restarts, as a means of sustaining more viable jobs and services that are otherwise at risk
- **Secondary co-operatives:** Central government and the sector should help fund a programme that enables the development of secondary co-operatives, through which groupings of co-operatives can raise finance, co-invest, innovate, share costs and collaborate on projects and contracts.
- **Pre-technical interventions:** Central government, strategic authorities and the sector should co-fund training for civil society organisations, trade unions and business advisors, to enable them to play a more effective role in 'pre-technical' co-operative development (outreach and awareness raising, supporting people to explore options at relevant junctures)
- **Tax:** drawing on successful policy in Italy, government could create a Corporation Tax relief on co-operative surpluses that are paid into an accredited co-operative

development fund. This would support a long-term funding stream for co-operative development that was not reliant on public funds.

25. Is there support or advice you think is missing for co-operatives and non-financial mutuals?

There is a particular lack of tailored support in the following areas:

- 'pre-technical' development (e.g. targeted outreach, supported exploration of options)
- start-up support tailored to some specific opportunity areas such as social care, housing, retrofit and agriculture
- support for onward growth, scale-up, diversification and secondary co-operation across all opportunity areas, sectors and types
- support tailored to mutualisation beyond planned succession using the EOT
- advice on raising capital beyond community shares
- support for co-operatives to demonstrate their social value and public value in procurement
- accountancy and legal services that understand and cater to co-operatives

26. What do you think is working well and what is working less well when it comes to how co-operative and non-financial mutual businesses access capital in Great Britain?

You may wish to comment on:

access to and types of capital (for example, loans, equity, grants or community shares)

how accessible these are for co-operatives and non-financial mutual models compared with other business models

examples of good practice or persistent difficulties

Co-operatives must take a distinctive approach to capital raising because of their purpose, ownership and governance. But the model is not intrinsically incapable of being capital intensive, as is demonstrated by the scale and impact of co-operatives (or co-operative networks) globally.

Up to a point, some co-operative models (e.g. community, consumer, consortium) can offer an advantage in crowdfunding patient, mission-aligned capital from stakeholders. The Community Shares finance model, a unique form of co-operative crowdfunding, has become a critical enabler of community ownership and community energy in the UK. We welcome reference to the model in Great British Energy's Strategic Plan on local and community energy.

In some parts of the world, co-operatives have built very effective specialist finance infrastructure that caters to them, harnessing the power of co-operation between one another. And often with some level of partnership with the state. This is yet to happen in a significant way in UK.

Unfortunately, the legal, institutional and market conditions in the UK do not cater sufficiently to the distinctive approach co-operatives must take to capital raising. This adds

exogenous obstacles to co-operative start-up, mutualisation and growth, particularly in more capital intensive contexts.

WPI Economics research found that the fastest-growing co-operatives in the UK are the most likely to face barriers to finance. WPI also found that private providers of finance (e.g. investors, high street banks) under-serve co-operatives in the following ways:

- the standard angel investor > venture capital > IPO/private exit route does not cater to co-operatives
- lack of understanding of co-operatives among lenders and investors, results in reluctance to invest, inaccurate risk assessment and inappropriate pricing, while the rarity of co-operatives results in 'volume penalties' for these businesses
- policies and processes in high street banks impede access to products and services
- this is exacerbated when automated systems used by lenders and credit reference agencies rely on public corporate registers that are deficient in how they present and share information on co-operatives and mutuals

Furthermore, the eligibility criteria and processes of philanthropic grant makers often unnecessarily impede or exclude co-operatives.

Many co-operatives, as with other social enterprise, also operate socially purposed business models, which do not support the repaying of some more expensive mainstream debt finance.

This is made worse by the current limitations and ambiguities in the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act. The £100,000 holding limit on withdrawable shares, lack of clear exit options for non-withdrawable shares, uncertainty about tradability and returns permitted to non-member investors, all significantly limit the ability of societies to raise equity from members and non-member investors (e.g. angel, impact and institutional investors). We strongly urge government to introduce legislation to address these issues in the next Parliamentary session.

Furthermore, while co-operatives must often be more reliant on accumulating and reinvesting retained surpluses than other businesses, and often have common capital mechanisms to ensure their surpluses are not distributable, their surpluses are subject to the same level of Corporation Tax as distributable profits in private benefit companies. This erodes the ability of co-operatives to accumulate common capital for reinvestment in themselves and other co-operatives.

It is notable that in countries with larger and more impactful co-operative economies, tax treatment supports commonwealth accumulation within and between co-operatives. This enables community resources held in common to be built up over time, enabling long-term social value creation without reliance on the state. This includes reliefs on surpluses retained in 'common capital' reserves in Italy, Spain, France and Germany.

WPI Economics also found that limited understanding of finance options within the co-operative sector, was also holding back growth. Getting the right advice and support on financing raising is certainly a key ingredient in the success of many co-operatives. For example, the success of Community Shares as a model (and the proliferation of impactful community co-operatives it helps enable) is underpinned by the existence of a network of particularly specialist advisors (community shares practitioners) and funded programmes (e.g. Community Ownership Fund Support Programme, Community Shares Booster Development Grants, Business Support for Co-ops) that enable communities to access this expertise. Community Shares has also been enabled by a robust but flexible sector-led

framework of standards (Community Shares Standards) focused on consumer protection, responsible business and co-operative practice. As the community ownership landscape grows in the UK, we aim for the Community Shares Standards system to become largely self-funded but it is currently reliant on grant support (between 2026 and 2029 funded by Esmée Fairbairn). And grant funding will be needed to create and develop any new standards frameworks beyond Community Shares.

Government enterprise finance schemes (e.g. British Business Bank, social investment) have not sufficiently addressed the above failures. That said, the use of dormant assets (via Access) to match invest in co-operatives alongside communities (via Booster Fund) has demonstrated the potential. As has some local financing initiatives in areas like Glasgow and Plymouth.

We should build on recent successes in the UK, including Community Shares, Community Shares Booster Fund (match equity investment alongside communities), the work of Co-operative and Community Finance, blended finance, guarantees and grants.

The UK should also emulate the practices and approaches found in the largest and most impactful co-operative economies around the world but currently lacking here. Firstly, a greater role for **specialist financing institutions** that cater to the distinctive purpose, ownership and governance of co-operatives, providing patient debt, equity and quasi-equity for start-up, scale-up and transition. Secondly, more effective **pooling and reinvestment of capital between co-operatives**. And thirdly, raising equity, quasi-equity and debt in larger amounts from **external investors**, in addition to members, including from specialist sector institutions, pension funds, impact investors and non-member retail investors.

Government's emerging Impact Economy agenda has the potential to improve access to finance for co-operatives. For example, a proposed investment 'staircase' model, developed by the Social Impact Investment Advisory Group, maps out a more enabling financing ecosystem. In purpose, design, governance and operations, co-operatives and other mutuals share value, wealth, power, and opportunity through day-to-day activity, so are an essential part of the UK's growing impact economy.

We recommend:

- **Specialist financing institutions:** Support the sector to capitalise and develop specialist financing institutions that can augment the investment capacity of communities and members, pool and recycle capital among co-operatives and crowd-in other patient private capital. Sector specialist Co-operative and Community Finance does great work, especially in patient debt, but is small and has had limited partnership with, or support from, government, despite being seed funded by UK government in the 1970s. Now, Co-operatives UK, Locality and Plunkett UK are working together to create a new investment institution that will scale up the Community Shares Booster Fund outside Co-operatives UK (who has piloted the fund in-house since 2016). We believe government funds should be combined with our existing £4m + portfolio and the returns this generates, to unlock millions more from communities. See our *Policy Plan for Growth* for more on this.
- **British Business Bank:** A proportionate amount of British Business Bank funds should be deployed in a way that caters to co-operatives and mutuals, with a small amount of public funds crowding in many times more from private sources (e.g. institutions, impact investors, intermediaries, communities, members, other mutuals).

- **Finance-related advice and support:** Help to fund and coordinate the provision of specialist finance-related advice for new and growing co-operatives, particularly in growth opportunity areas. This includes helping to fund the training and ongoing professional development of advisors. Support our work to develop and maintain high standards in co-operative capital raising, including but not limited to Community Shares Standards.
- **Legislation:** modernizing the Co-operative and Community benefit Societies Act, to enable societies to raise more capital from both non-member investors and members, while safeguarding common purpose, member control and common ownership of assets.
- **Common Capital Tax Relief:** creating a Corporation Tax relief on non-distributable surpluses (e.g. surpluses retained in a community benefit society, in the indivisible reserve in a co-operative society), or surpluses transferred to an accredited co-operative development institution

28. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Competition law and enforcement: To better enable secondary co-operation and the development of enterprise co-operatives, government should review competition law, how it is enforced, and related guidance for firms, so that these do not unduly deter legal and beneficial co-operation between entities. This includes co-operation that enables innovation, investment, net zero, societal resilience and a counterbalancing of dominant market power.

Procurement: It is crucial that government recognises the significant challenges put onto co-operatives and public service mutuals, through the procurement process within the public sector. The risk-averse approach from local government that leads to the use of the procurement process limits the start-up of new co-operatives in the public sector and creates uncertainty that limits business growth. There is a role for Government to champion and support different commissioning routes for local government which recognise the inherent social value of community businesses who deliver public benefit and reinvest in local communities. Where co-operatives and public service mutuals, working well in partnership with local authorities, this needs to be promoted and shown that public contracts can be extended.

Marginalised and disadvantaged groups: We have heard from a range of members that there needs to be funding for co-operative development that explicit seeks to reach, empower and benefit disadvantaged and marginalised groups in society, including those on low incomes, people in high-deprivation areas, BAME, LGBT and neuro-diverse communities. For example, we would welcome the opportunity to build on our work to make community shares more accessible to the Muslim community.

Training advisors: There is a need to fund training and ongoing development for advisors, including specialists, and early-stage sign-posters working in mainstream business support, professional services and civil society. We have heard from many members that the number of co-operative development workers are clustered in parts of the country and there is a lack of training for the next generation to come through. This is exacerbated by the end of programmes like Barefoot, due to a lack of funding.

Education and Awareness raising: We have heard from many young members of co-operatives that they face a barrier getting involved or starting up new co-operatives because of a lack of awareness over traditional forms of business. To tackle this

Government needs to explore putting co-operatives on the curriculum and how they can support the movement and universities to ensure Business Schools within Universities support skills to enable next generation to start up co-operatives or take on leading roles in existing ones

International trade and export: Access to international markets is critically important to many agricultural co-operatives. Meanwhile a small but growing number of co-operatives also export or operate across borders. And there is potential for the enterprise co-operative model to enable groups of UK SMEs to work together to access international trade on more efficient and beneficial terms. We recommend that the Co-operative and Mutual Unit in DBT creates opportunities for co-operatives to participate in DBT's international trade activity.

Accounting standards: We would welcome FRC working with the sector to ensure UK accounting standards and practice accommodate and enable co-operatives.

Supporting organisations

The following organisations and individuals have explicitly requested to be listed as supporters of our response:

241 Co-operators

Birmingham Bank Foundry

Carbon Co-op

Community Leisure

Community Shares Company

Co-op Young Members Group

Co-operate Scotland LLP

Co-operative and Community Finance

Coventry Building Society

David Castle

Don Morris, CEO of Radstock Co-operative Society

Energy4All

Exeter Street Hall

Football Supporters Association

Maintaining Health Partners

Newfield Medical Group

Our Community Enterprise CIC

People Powered Retrofit

Radstock Co-operative Society

Sanford Housing Co-operative

Southampton Area Coop Development Agency

Stirchley Co-operative Development

Suma

Wirral Co-op Party Branch

Participating organisations

The following organisations and individuals provided input to our response, through surveys, written feedback, meetings and video calls. Where possible, we have sought to incorporate their contributions into coherent aligned positions. In listing them here, we do not claim that our response fully-aligns with their views on every point. Where they have divergent views, we have advised them to submit their own response to the call for evidence. We would like to put on record our thanks and acknowledgment to all those who helped us produce our response:

Allie's Art Club

Andrew Boys

Backdoor Housing

Catherine Brentnall, Senior Lecturer in Business at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Centre for a new Economy

Chris Webb

Community Empowerment

Community Energy Barnet

Community Energy Barnet

Community Energy England

Community Energy Newham

Community Leisure

Community Shares Company

Confederation of Co-operative Housing

Co-op College

Co-operative and Community Finance

Co-operative Assistance Network Limited

Co-operative Councils Innovation Network

Co-operative Futures

Co-operatives East Midlands

Co-operatives West Midlands`

Cwmpas

Des Rose

Elaine Fullway

Elisavet Mantzari, Associate Professor in Accounting at Birmingham University

Energy4All

Football Supporters Association

Fram Farmers

George Conchie

Gerald Wistow
Greenwich Leisure
Jane Avery, Member of Co-operative Group's National Members Council
Co-operative and Community Finance
Co-operative Futures
Sister Midnight
Co-operative Assistance Network Limited
Community Energy Barnet
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Jurgen Forster
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Lambeth GP Food Network
Lia Rees
New Leaf
North East Business and Innovation Centre
Oldham Community Leisure
Phillip Watson
Phone Co-op Foundation for co-op Innovation
Wrigleys Solicitors LLP
Southampton Area Coop Development Agency
South West Co-op Development
North East Business and Innovation Centre
Plunkett
Radical Routes
Reading Hydro CBS
Repowering London
Scotmid
Community Empowerment
Cwmpas
Lambeth GP Food Network
Union:Coops.UK
Stir to Action
Co-op College
Backdoor Housing
Community Energy Barnet
Community Energy Newham

Confederation of Co-operative Housing
Greenwich Leisure
Football Supporters Association
Plunkett
Community Energy England
Co-operative Councils Innovation Network
Energy4All
Student Co-op Homes
Radical Routes
Community Leisure
Oldham Community Leisure
New Leaf
Seymour Housing Co-op
Suma
Fram Farmers
Joe Joseph, Convenor South West Peninsula Co-operative Party
Elaine Fullway
Phillip Watson
Kindling Farm
Elisavet Mantzari, Associate Professor in Accounting at Birmingham University
Repowering London
Allie's Art Club
Centre for a new Economy
Sister Midnight
South West Co-op Development
South West Peninsula Co-op Party Council
Southampton Area Coop Development Agency
Stephen Baggaley
Stir to Action
Student Co-op Homes
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