

# **EXETER & DEVON BRANCH OF THE CO-OPERTATIVE PARTY** **NEWSLETTER**

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## **Note change of date** **Exeter & Devon Co-operative Party**

**THURSDAY, 6<sup>th</sup> December**  
Exeter Labour Hall, 26B Clifton Hill, Exeter.  
**7.00 – Branch meeting**

**7.45 – Co-operative policies for Local Government**  
**Discussion open to all interested**  
**led by Cllr. Richard Westlake**  
**and Cllr. Saxon Spence**

### **National news - Co-operative Party election Success**

There was excellent news for the Co-operative Party on Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> November with the election of three new Labour and co-operative M.Ps. giving a record number of 31 co-operative MPs. You may have seen Labour Leader Ed Miliband standing alongside our fantastic new Labour & Co-operative MP for Corby, Andy Sawford. Andy achieved an incredible result, winning back the seat from the Conservatives with a thumping majority. His victory will send a strong message to the Tory-led government about the unpopularity of their policies. Joining Andy in the Co-operative parliamentary group will be Lucy Powell in Manchester Central - the heart of the UK co-operative movement - and Stephen Doughty in Cardiff South & Penarth, formerly the Head of Oxfam Cymru and a champion of international development.

There were also two Co-operative Party successes in the PCC elections when Alan Michael and Olly Martin were elected as Police Commissioners for South Wales and Bedfordshire.

**Local News – County elections** - Richard Westlake has been re-selected at the Labour/Co-operative candidate for Exeter, Newtown/Polsloe. He is also Vice-Chair of the Devon Labour Party Campaign Forum of which Saxon Spence is Secretary. The Forum, open to all Labour members in Devon, is working with the Labour Group on the manifesto and campaign for the County council elections in May 2013.

**Contact:** Please let us have your e-mail if we do not have it, as this is the easiest way to communicate and saves postage.

**Credit Unions and Legal Loan Sharks** - Saxon asked the leader of Devon County Council at October's County Council meeting whether he was aware of the campaign to end legalised loan sharking by limiting the amount of interest and fees that can be added to loan repayments, and what action the Council was taking to support the growth of credit unions in Devon to enable residents to access low interest loans. He replied: "The term legalised loan sharking is commonly used by campaign groups such as Citizens UK to refer to high cost credit, for example credit with high interest rates as in the case of some Payday lenders reaching several 1000s % interest. The term should not be confused with the description 'loan sharks', a popular name for illegal unlicensed credit provider. The UK is unique in the EU, in that credit legislation does not impose a cap on the amount of interest that can be charged on loans. Responding to campaign groups and following a report into the operation of the consumer credit market published in 2010 by the Office of Fair Trading, the current government has commissioned research into the credit market, including High Cost Loans.

Credit unions." A report detailing the results of this research was published by BIS in July 2012 (Credit, Debt and Financial Difficulty in Britain, 2011). The report contained detailed research findings to help the government determine whether and how it should regulate further in this area. Consumer Focus, a government funded organisation currently being replaced by Citizens Advice as part of the governments landscape review of consumer protection, supported such a cap on interest rates, and called for a bigger role for community based alternative lending [e.g. credit unions]. The County Councils Trading Standards Service enforces the provisions of the Consumer Credit Act. Trading Standards Services across the country recently took part in audits of Pay Day Lending companies, at the request of the OFT [there are none based in Devon so we were not required to participate). We warn of the dangers of payday loans and have promoted alternative community providers through our regular phone in show on Radio Devon. We also work together with the national Illegal Money lending Team to identify and take action against suspect illegal unlicensed moneylenders (loan sharks).

I have tasked a group of officers to look at ways in which the County Council might support people affected by forthcoming welfare reforms. One area the group is considering is the way in which the County Council supports voluntary and community sector organisations and this includes

**\*\*\*\*\* SW CG Party Council Weekend Conference 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> January \*\*\*\*\***

**Co-operative Solutions to Local Problems** - The SW Weekend Conference is held at Brunel Manor, Torquay. The theme has been chosen for the run up to the local elections in May. Speakers include: Stella Creasy MP, who is leading the campaign against legal loan sharks, speakers from C-operative enterprises and the Co-operative Group. Karin Christiansen, General Secretary of the Co-operative Party, will speak at the Saturday dinner

The weekend is open to Labour Party members and runs from Saturday lunch-time to Sunday lunch-time and costs £85 for accommodation and all meals. There is also a day rate of £5 a day, £30 to include Saturday lunch and dinner, £20 to include for Sunday lunch. You will be getting details by e-mail or post. The branch will decide on the subsidy for members on 6th December so let Saxon know if you want to attend all or any of the weekend.

**Membership** -Thanks to members who have paid their subs for the current year. The annual fee is now £20 and for unwaged members £12, payable locally. You can pay Paul Bull, Membership Secretary, or Ted Duley, Treasurer, at our next meeting. Or by post to Saxon Spence, Flat 6, Clifton Court, Clifton Hill, Exeter, EX1 2EL. Direct debit is the easiest way to renew your membership and there is a form on the Co-op Party website. We will be updating our list of members and very much hope you want to continue in membership.