

A vision of future, fair communities built on co-operative values

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Foundation



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Contents

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Foreword

Nick Crofts, Co-op Foundation CEO

In November 2021, the Co-op Foundation team completed the first phase of our work on a bold and ambitious new strategy. This will see us fund organisations and individuals working to develop communities that, in 10 years' time, are fair and built on co-operative values.

Our strategy was created with colleagues, the Co-op and our funded partners. We imagined creatively what we could build together, and we inputted equitably to develop a new direction that excited everyone.

For a few fleeting moments, it appeared our work was done. However, the challenge of turning this into a working plan had only just started.

In addition to building a new direction for learning and funding, we also had to fully understand what a vision of communities in 10 years' time could really look like.

This is where almost 100 young people came to the fore.

Recruited from across the UK and covering a rich diversity of gender, ability, ethnicity, rural and urban backgrounds, and geographical locations, this group worked with our partners at Beatfreeds to shape an aspirational vision of fairness, co-operation and sustainability.

This vision was devised through 10 focus groups and four WhatsApp messaging diaries. Young people acknowledged the big issues their generation were

facing today, such as the cost of living crisis, and came up with interventions and solutions that would build greater equity tomorrow. They were future-focused and imagined a world where communities were empowered to come together under Co-op's vision of 'Co-operating for a Fairer World'.

I'm incredibly proud of everything this group of young experts has created. Summarised in this report are their insights and their beliefs for a better world full of fairer and more co-operative communities.

As an open and trusting grantmaker with a real co-operative difference, it is now up to us to turn their vision into reality. We'll do this with our partners through flexible, unrestricted, multi-year funding, and work together with other funders to make donations from Co-op Members go even further.

We'll set in motion a new trailblazing direction backed by the brand and scale of the Co-op, which already does so much to strengthen communities.

I've met some inspirational young people throughout my 20 years in the co-operative movement. Many have had an incredible impact. I believe passionately that the work this group has completed will create similar outcomes for communities all the way up to 2032.

I hope you are as motivated as we are by the young people's vision. Join us in making it a reality.

Let's build communities of the future together.

“Young people were future-focused, and they imagined a world where communities were empowered to come together under Co-op's vision of 'Co-operating for a Fairer World'”



Introduction

Co-op Foundation is the Co-op's charity and we're co-operating for a fairer world.

We're a trailblazing funder supported by the strength and scale of the Co-op. We're proud to take risks and we bring partners together to share learning. We're a funder with a co-operative difference, committed to open and trusting grantmaking.

This report brings together insight from young people on what future, fair communities could look like if they were built on co-operative values.

Today's young people will inherit these communities, so we asked them, through our partners at full-service insight and engagement agency, Beatfrees, to shape our vision.

Young people aged 11 to 25 years old, including Co-op Members, got involved through focus groups and WhatsApp diaries. Read more about how they participated and how we ensured we had input from a diverse group of young people in our methodology.

Their insight has been distilled into this report, which will become the cornerstone of our new strategy, and our funding and campaigning decisions.

The priority areas young people identified as crucial for building future fair communities are:

- Prosperity and access to opportunity
- Safety
- Diversity, equity and inclusion
- Health and wellbeing
- Sustainability
- Youth activism, shared power and transparent governance



We will examine each of these priority areas in turn over the next few pages. We'll use direct quotes from young people (in italics) to bring their vision to life. And we'll look in detail at what stakeholders like the Government, businesses and funders can do to turn this into reality. This will include what we can do, as Co-op's charity.

We will also examine what co-operative values, the historic values that guide co-operatives worldwide, mean for today's young people.

Methodology

The fieldwork for this visioning study took place in May and June 2022. It included:

- Face-to-face and virtual focus groups (3 to 31 May)
- WhatsApp messaging diaries (29 May to 4 June)

Almost 100 young people aged 11 to 25 years old took part in this study. We prioritised the recruitment of young people from a wide variety of backgrounds and locations, and captured demographic and diversity data to help us choose the final participants. Final data was reviewed using thematic analysis, taking into account focus group transcripts, online jam boards, flip chart entries and WhatsApp diary responses. Thematic analysis allowed us to summarise key features of a large body of data, offer a 'thick description' of the data set, highlight similarities and differences across the data set, and generate unanticipated insights.

We believe that young people should be compensated for their time, as both a recognition of their expertise and to lift any barriers to participation. We provided bursaries of £50 and £150 for those who took part in focus groups and WhatsApp diaries. Donations of £400 were also made to the charities where we held face-to-face focus groups to reflect the work they put in to support us.

Email foundation@coop.co.uk for more information on our methodology and data.

Methods

Focus groups

Ten focus groups were used to gather qualitative feedback from young people on their vision of future communities. Focus groups work well with young people because they give them the chance to talk openly on set topics.

The first four focus groups were exploratory and run virtually. Working online allowed us to reach young people more widely, including those from rural areas, young people who had limited time available and disabled participants.

Sessions focused on exploring young people's interpretation of co-operative values and discussing how they would envisage their future, fair communities built on these values. Based on the exploratory sessions, six themes emerged that represented key aspects of the future, fair communities young people imagined. Young people looked at these key themes in the next focus groups, two of which were held in person at our partners, Off The Record (Bristol) and Youth Focus: North East, in Gateshead. These themes have now been turned into strategic priorities for the Co-op Foundation's future work (see page 7).

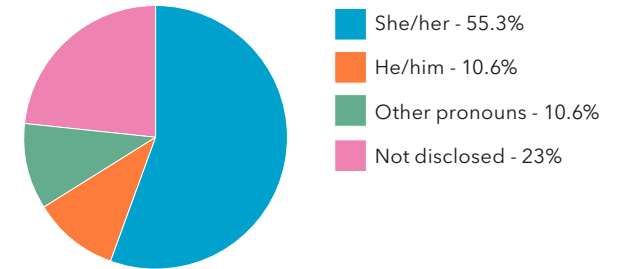
WhatsApp diaries

In addition to focus groups, 10 young people took part in WhatsApp messaging diaries. WhatsApp diaries allowed us to capture data differently. Data is more considered and thought about, as participants can respond in their own their own environment and space.

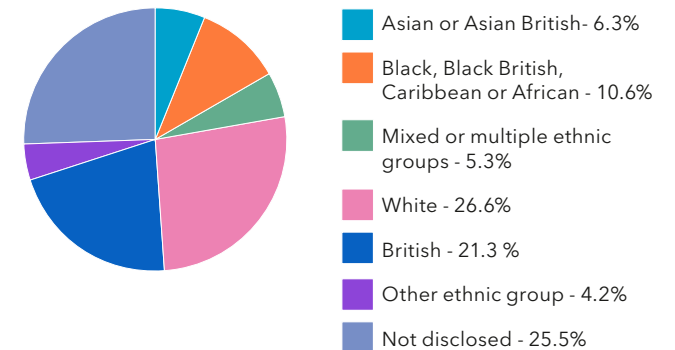
Participants were sent four prompts to answer across four dates. They were encouraged to respond to each prompt with at least 600 words. Prompts focused on four out of the six themes chosen in the first four focus groups.

Participant background

Gender, based on their preferred pronoun

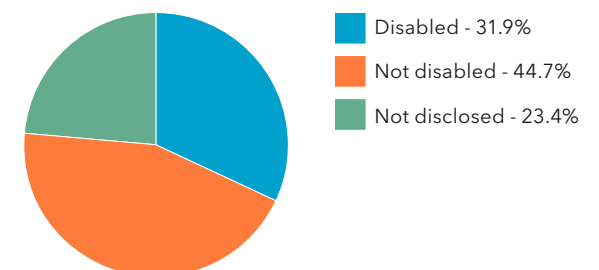


Ethnicity



Please note, there may be an overlap in ethnicity categorisation because it reflects how participants chose to describe themselves.

Disability



Future Communities Vision

Shaped by young people

This is our vision of what we believe communities should be like in 10 years' time. Young people like us are ready to help build them, and to inherit them.

In 10 years' time our communities are fair. They are stronger because people come together to co-operate.

In 10 years' time, we all have opportunities to learn and thrive, incomes that are secure, and affordable homes, whatever our background.

We feel safe and respected wherever we go. And even if we've made mistakes, we feel welcomed.

In 10 years' time, our communities are equitable. We celebrate our diversity and we educate each other so we can all feel included, appreciated and involved.

We prioritise our health and wellbeing. Everyone has the opportunity to get involved in physical activity, and we work together to strengthen our mental wellbeing.

In 10 years' time, we've made real strides to tackle the impact of climate change. And we're finding ways to live more sustainably, too.

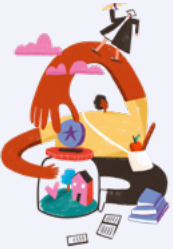

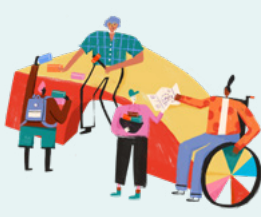

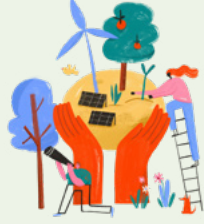

With every passing day, our young voices have grown stronger. Power is shared more equally, and people act on what we say.

Ten years from now, we live in communities based on fairness, unity and co-operation.



Our strategic priorities

We will work with our partners, campaigners, match-funders and the Co-op to turn young people's vision into reality.

<p>We will help to create:</p>	<p>Prosperous communities with access to opportunity</p> 	<p>Safe communities</p> 	<p>Diverse, equitable and inclusive communities</p> 	<p>Healthy communities</p> 	<p>Sustainable communities</p> 	<p>Communities that prioritise youth activism, shared power and transparent governance</p> 
<p>By supporting organisations and individuals that...</p>	<p>Enable people to have meaningful opportunities to learn and work.</p> <p>Provide access to affordable and adequate places to live, and affordable and healthy food.</p> <p>Ensure people are paid fairly for the work they do and can afford to live decent and sustainable lives.</p>	<p>Enable us all to feel safe and respected.</p> <p>Rehabilitate people when they make mistakes, and welcome them back into communities.</p> <p>Work in youth centres or community centres to keep people away from crime, support them to share their challenges, and enable them to collaborate.</p>	<p>Celebrate, raise awareness of, and advocate for diversity and inclusion in all sectors of society.</p> <p>Provide accessible and welcoming spaces in the community that cater for different needs and for people with different backgrounds.</p> <p>Enable people to have fair opportunities for education and work, regardless of their background.</p>	<p>Support people to have good mental health through access to services and education.</p> <p>Enable us all to work together to protect and strengthen wellbeing.</p> <p>Support people to have good physical health and enable everyone to have the time and opportunity to exercise.</p>	<p>Know about sustainable solutions, raise awareness of them, and put them into practice for a just transition.</p> <p>Come together to preserve and nurture local green spaces for the benefit of communities.</p>	<p>Educate young people from diverse backgrounds in leadership and politics, and enable them to be involved in decision-making.</p> <p>Enable young people to self-organise, find resources and get into positions of power to co-create solutions to issues that matter to them.</p>

What co-operative values mean for today's young people

Co-operatives worldwide are founded on a set of values and principles upheld by the International Co-operative Alliance.

As Co-op's charity and as a funder with a co-operative difference, our ways of working are strongly aligned to these values.

We asked young people to examine what these values meant to them in their vision of future, fair communities in 10 years' time.



Solidarity:

"Members of a community standing together as a united front to create positive change."

In our visioning sessions, young people said solidarity involves "togetherness" and bringing about "a sense of unity and empathy". They see people supporting others with altruism and focusing help on those who need it most. Celebrating diversity and other cultures is a good example of solidarity, while young people also recognise solidarity as everyone in a community feeling like they've been heard with no discrimination. They cite the Black Lives Matter movement as an example.

Democracy:

"Including young people in decisions, being given an equal opportunity to vote and empowering everyone to have their say on how countries and communities are run."

Young people view democracy as people being given the opportunity to vote and make decisions that help the wider community. They talk about the importance of representativeness and having individuals with diverse backgrounds making a difference to benefit the wider society. Another crucial aspect of democracy is everyone having access to impartial political information and education. Young people talk about democracy in conjunction with equal opportunities and emphasise the need for their voice to be heard, too.

Self-responsibility:

"Being accountable for your own actions and self-improving, while also helping others and society."

Self-responsibility is predominantly viewed as people being self-aware, taking actions for themselves, reflecting on how to become a better person and being accountable for their actions. Self-responsibility is also perceived as caring and helping others. Young people are clear in their belief that you need to give individuals the resources to do things for themselves, in order for them to be self-responsible.

Equality:

"Everyone having access to the same resources and opportunities while also having a voice and being included, regardless of their backgrounds."

Equality is viewed as everyone in society having the same access to education, healthcare, employment, and affordable food and housing, regardless of their gender, abilities, social status and ethnicity. Young people also view equality in terms of giving people the same opportunities irrespective of their backgrounds. Finally, equality is seen as everyone having their voice heard and participating in all aspects of social life.

Equity:

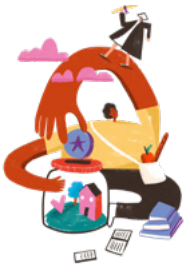
"Helping each individual according to their level of need and making accommodations to create a level playing field where everyone can achieve their potential."

Young people acknowledge that to have equality, we first need to ensure equity. They recognise that some people need more support than others, and it is important to ask individuals what help they need rather than to make assumptions. They point to examples of achieving equity in education with the provision of free school meals.

Self-help:

"Looking after yourself so you can support others and coming together to drive positive community change."

Young people say self-help involves individuals coming together to bring about positive change, for example, through campaigning or community work. It is also seen as developing an individual mindset so you can support others. Mental and physical health were prevalent themes associated with self-help.



Prosperity and access to opportunity in future, fair communities

The vision

"No one has to worry about basic needs."

In young people's vision of future, fair communities in 10 years' time, everyone would be financially secure and educated about financial management. They would also have a universal basic income so they could fulfil their basic rights in relation to housing, income and food. The living wage would be the minimum wage for people in employment, and there'd be equal pay for all ages.

Young people felt strongly that poverty and homelessness should no longer exist in future communities and, where needed, there should be more aid money, including Universal Credit and financial aid centres. Financial help and free advice would be available for people of all ages to improve their lives. This need has been highlighted because of the cost-of-living crisis.

Young people also suggested housing would be affordable for people no matter what their wage is, and there would be more opportunities for people to buy their own home. Aligned to their vision of sustainable communities (see page 18), housing would be environmentally friendly, of good quality and aesthetically beautiful, and pets would be allowed (especially in rented houses). Young people acknowledged the need for more apartments in the future rather than houses due to the high demand and the importance of tackling homelessness.

"[There will be] housing that matches minimum wages."

"There would also be no homeless [people] on the streets since everyone is housed."

Young people expressed that in fair communities, people would all be able to afford healthy and sustainable food and be educated about healthy eating. This would mean people cared more about having a balanced, healthy diet containing less highly-processed food.

All people, no matter their economic background, need food access. It was suggested that free school dinners would be offered to ensure young people are fed no matter their background or household income.

"I hope, because of the type of community we've made, food is local, sustainable, healthy and cheaper."

In young people's vision, people would also be able to access satisfying jobs they feel passionate about. They would have access to mentors and follow a career with good work-life balance and progression, as well as the opportunity to pursue different career paths. Young people from less privileged backgrounds would be given equal opportunities and support to get into highly paid, satisfying jobs. There would be zero discrimination in the job application process, for example, for disabled people.

"Ensuring that all people in workplaces have equal access and opportunity to all training, payment and other opportunities regardless of sex, gender, age or disability."



Who can help turn this vision into reality, and how?

“One thing that is neglected is not offering specific opportunities to specific groups... so moving beyond just saying everyone needs equal access. For that to be the case truly, we need deliberately crafted opportunities for specific groups.”

Young people recommended a variety of solutions to help build more prosperous communities with particular support needed from government, educators, celebrities and journalists. They also suggested exciting and different methods to create change, including social media campaigns and activism.

Suggested government support featured heavily and focused on funding. Bringing in a universal basic income and making disability benefits easier to access would help tackle inequity. But young people want this to go further, too, for example, by providing financial grants to support maternity leave.

Young people also suggested the Government could do more to tackle the wealth divide, including increasing taxes for higher earners and using their taxes to ensure everyone is supported.

Young people also recognised that, although equality within societies is the ultimate goal, society is not quite there yet. Because of this, it is crucial to focus support on minority groups to ensure they are getting equal opportunities. Support should start by asking people what they need rather than assuming what their needs are.

Looking towards education providers, young people talked about the importance of everyone having equal access to an education, regardless of their financial situation. They also said education should be tailored to suit the individual.

Financial management, budgeting and life skills could be included in the school curriculum to prepare students for an independent life.

“Making education public is perhaps the biggest driver towards a fair community - as a high-quality education would be freely accessible to all, ensuring each child has access to the same set of tools and resources for the best possible quality of life.”

Homelessness and housing were major topics of discussion and young people had strong opinions about what can make a difference. Participants said there should be no homeless people on the streets and people should be given appropriate, stable accommodation, rather than just hostel spaces. The provision of communal safe spaces to battle homelessness was also mentioned. Banks and businesses were identified as providers of funding for tackling homelessness. Support for homeless people during the pandemic showed how this could be done in a way that ensures people have dignity.



“First, we need to empower those in need to talk about the support mechanisms that they would need.”

Young people also suggested creating a price cap for food and reducing the cost of items like gluten-free alternatives, baby and menstrual products. They also suggested that communities will need to come together at times, potentially supported by apps. Examples of projects that communities could work on together included communal gardening and youth groups, which would then open up volunteering opportunities and support for those who needed it. Young people said that working collaboratively was the most effective way forwards for society.

“There are local community projects near me that are bringing food to people who need it, helping with electricity bills and stuff when the Government has failed. It is important to have a strong basis of community support so, when it goes wrong at the bigger level, you are not screwed.”

What the Co-op Foundation will do

We'll help to build prosperous communities in 10 years' time by supporting organisations and individuals that:

- Enable people to have meaningful opportunities to learn and work.
- Provide access to affordable and adequate places to live, and affordable and healthy food.
- Ensure people are paid fairly for the work they do and can afford to live decent and sustainable lives.



Safety in future, fair communities

The vision

"In an ideal community, everyone needs to feel safe, regardless of anything about them. [We need to] make sure there are services in place so that women, in particular, can feel safe."

Young people want to live in future, fair communities that are safe and crime-free and that prioritise the rehabilitation of offenders. Within this vision, young people also emphasised the importance of women feeling safe. Their future, fair communities would have no sexual harassment or violence against women. If women ended up in a crisis situation, easily accessible services, helplines and centres would be available to support them.

"Safe community spaces - [it means being] able to walk freely at any time of the day without being assaulted, harassed or killed. No disagreement or physical fights with peers or family members. No destruction of property. No severe violence of any kind. No alcohol-related crimes."

In young people's vision, there would also be spaces for the community to meet, interact and collaborate alongside a wealth of free activities for all ages. Several different types of spaces were mentioned, including youth centres, community halls, local parks and free spaces that were open and well-lit for adventure play and sport. Some of these would be designated spaces for the young people to play outdoors freely, do graffiti, paint and express themselves.

A variety of activities would be offered within these spaces, including clubs for older and younger people, activities that keep young people away from committing crime, community events, community challenges, sports events and intellectual activities.

Volunteers would also play a role in welcoming new members to these community spaces, providing information about local services and amenities and giving people confidence that their new residential area is safe.

"Communities of the future will have a focus on collaboration. This might take the form of collaborative community workspaces or community centres. Social spaces that include a cross-section of our communities are bound to be positive - with a strong sense of ecological action undoubtedly being a focus of community living in the future."

Young people said the justice system would change in their vision, too. In 10 years' time, there would be a greater focus on supporting offenders with their rehabilitation so they can become active members of their communities. They would be given accommodation and opportunities to work, and the Government would create regulations to allow this.

"Rehabilitation will see criminals integrated into a working community rather than thrown out of it. Perhaps having high street shops employing former low-level criminals would be a good option."



Who can help turn this vision into reality, and how?

“In order to reduce crime, you need to reduce the factors that lead to it. Poverty is 100% the first thing that comes to mind in this regard. I’ll use the example of knife crime since I’m familiar with it after growing up in London.”

Participants suggested several actions that would increase community safety in 10 years’ time, including tackling the causes of crime, improving the justice system and providing more education to people in authority.

They say the Government can play its part by introducing a community tax to help regenerate areas and make streets safer. Government also needs to be more involved on the ground to better understand who is feeling unsafe and to set up a tailored approach to resolving the issues. Campaigns to encourage people to report harassment or assault, and lift any associated feelings of shame, would also help and police could support this by talking directly to young people in schools and colleges.

To help tackle the causes of crime, young people suggested funding local youth schemes and youth work to keep peers away from crime, while also increasing the presence of role models in poorer communities. Well-resourced youth centres, particularly in areas with low social investment, could run programmes to prevent crime from a young age.

“Educating young people on what is not ‘okay’ is extremely important because social media makes it so easy for young people to be taken advantage of or be groomed.”

“Often, crime happens as a result of a difficult start to life or an improper education as a result of systemic inequality and discrimination. [This] makes it difficult to secure a job and earn a living.”

Other interventions were more systems-based. Young people said that new legislation on drugs and sex work could put boundaries in place to prevent crime, while they also saw rehabilitation as a constructive and positive activity. Tackling the stigma of this could prevent reoffending and reduce crime rates. The justice system should also support ex-prisoners through training, coaching, housing and work opportunities so they will not re-offend. Government should invest in getting ex-offenders qualified for fulfilling work.

Young people also said policing on the streets needed to improve and specific education given to people in positions of authority about issues like mental health and disability. Young people acknowledged that not all disabilities are visible. That’s why it is crucial that individuals working in public services, such as the police, know the signs to look out for.

What the Co-op Foundation will do

We’ll help to build safe communities in 10 years’ time by supporting organisations and individuals that:

- Enable us all to feel safe and respected.
- Rehabilitate people when they make mistakes, and welcome them back into communities.
- Work in youth centres or community centres to keep people away from crime, support them to share their challenges, and enable them to collaborate.





Diversity, equity and inclusion in future, fair communities

The vision

"I feel like the world would just be a better place. Communities would be more open to different people's backgrounds, because you can learn, like, so much more, instead of just thinking like your background. The best sort of thing - just be more open to difference, like diversity."

Young people want to inherit a future community where every person, regardless of their background, is included, respected and able to take part in all aspects of community life. In this vision, there would be no discrimination or bias, and people would feel comfortable and confident discussing their ideas and choices. We would also be more aware of other people's backgrounds, religions, races, genders and ages, and - importantly - more accepting. People would be caring, too, for those who face the biggest hardship, such as refugees or asylum seekers.

Everyone would be celebrated and we'd enjoy a sense of belonging within a truly inclusive culture. Social media will play a positive role in linking communities worldwide and sharing culture.

"Everyone is supporting each other, helping each other out without judging others."

"Awareness of other communities, because I feel that's what's mainly causing, like division, or misinterpretation and stereotypes, especially towards religions and races. Like, for example, with Islamophobia. The majority of Islamophobia is

caused by a misinterpretation and lack of information on that certain religion."

Within this future community, young people say infrastructure, facilities, public spaces and work environments would cater to different needs. They would also be accessible for people with disabilities and represent people from different backgrounds.

"Companies and public bodies [should be] putting in place effective employment strategies to ensure the representation of different groups."

"People from different cultures and races celebrate together and then move forward as one."

In this vision, everyone would be provided with equal and equitable support. This includes equal access to healthcare regardless of income and financial status, as well as education and freedom of speech. People would also have equal opportunities in their workplace.

"People are paid equally and given the same job opportunities regardless of appearance."



More than any other theme, young people taking part in our workshops consistently highlighted different dimensions of diversity, inclusion, equity and equality in their vision of future, fair communities. This demonstrated just how deeply they care about these issues and how important it is that they're embedded into everyday life in their future communities.

Who can help turn this vision into reality, and how?

“It is 2022, and I’m still hearing of the first ‘this’ and the first ‘that’. It is eye-opening to hear stories of the first black woman entering a specific field or the first gay person to reach a certain position of power.”

Young people told us that fair communities are only possible in a dynamic and changing society. They also directed us to improvements that can be made at all levels to make things fairer, more diverse and more equitable.

As with all aspects of their vision, central government, and to a lesser extent, local authorities both have a role to play. Young people said central government should introduce inclusivity and equality laws and set up education and awareness programmes. They also suggested public funding needed to be spent and allocated based on diversity, equality and inclusion. What’s more, people need to know what support they’re entitled to and how to access it, while the Government, itself, should be more transparent on how money is spent.

Local councils can deliver on the vision by making all public spaces and buildings accessible and by catering to people with different needs and backgrounds. Young people suggested that, to avoid tokenism, changes needed to be implemented by a diverse group of people, and any scheme or programme should be designed by those who will be affected by it. This input could be enhanced by creating an elected role whose job it is to connect with the community and ensure all views are being taken into account.

Education providers also have a role in helping to normalise disabilities to reduce the levels of discrimination. They should also ensure young people are educated about a range of cultures and religions alongside topics such as sex education, LGBTQ+ and religion. Education was seen as a helpful tool for tackling deep-rooted societal issues, such as stigma and issues surrounding diversity and inclusion.

Employers can make a difference by creating more equitable processes to recruit new colleagues and

by closing pay gaps. Inclusion in the workplace would also mean individuals feel appreciated and accepted in their team. Companies also need to show their support for diverse groups while social media must change and disseminate more messages promoting inclusion, diversity and equity.

Funders, equally, have an important role to play by encouraging people to share their cultural heritage, raising awareness of diversity in communities, including disability, and creating a sense of togetherness so we can all learn about different cultures and abilities. Funders should also work alongside government to improve accessibility and be more flexible with how their money is spent.

“I feel trusting the relevant people to do the best they can and have the relevant knowledge is a great start. Providing funding that is not tied but allows groups true freedom to spend it how they feel best. For example, I was recently granted funding from the Scottish Transition Fund, which I could use to fund any goals that were important to me [as a disabled person].”



What the Co-op Foundation will do

We’ll help to build diverse, equitable and inclusive communities in 10 years’ time by supporting organisations and individuals that:

- Celebrate, raise awareness of, and advocate for diversity and inclusion in all sectors of society.
- Provide accessible and welcoming spaces in the community that cater for different needs and for people with different backgrounds.
- Enable people to have fair opportunities for education and work, regardless of their background.



Health and wellbeing in future, fair communities

The vision

"You can't pour from an empty glass. [You] have to make sure you are looking after yourself, otherwise you won't be able to help others, too."

Young people strongly expressed that, in their vision, communities in 10 years' time are healthy and promote positive mental health.

Focusing first on mental health, young people said talking openly would be important and that increased awareness would continue to help tackle stigma. Support services such as mental health advisers and counsellors would also be accessible and free, while a more positive work-life balance would be beneficial for all. They said future employers would provide dedicated mental health days, flexible working arrangements would be common and less time would be spent at work. In this vision, people would also have the option of working from home when they need to, but also going into the office to interact with others. People would feel comfortable taking time off when they needed it for their mental health.

Young people also spoke about the importance of feeling happy in a way that "made sense for them". There would be, overall, less expectation and pressure to have high levels of wellbeing all the time and people would also feel less pressure to conform to a certain way of life. In 10 years' time, young people want to see communities where we



do things we are curious about and focus on things that foster the human spirit.

Physical health would be better, too, under young people's vision. People would stay active through exercise like cycling, running and group sports. They would spend less time using technology and go to green spaces more often to exercise with friends and family and get involved in community events. This would have a knock-on effect of more positive mental health and stronger communities.

Communities would also work together to improve their surroundings and volunteering would be the norm. Facilities such as libraries, museums, learning centres and sports would cater for the young and the elderly, too.

Finally, young people say healthcare would be improved in their vision. High quality services and modern facilities would be accessible and free for everybody with no privatisation.

Who can help turn this vision into reality, and how?

"[We need] more awareness with regards to mental health issues and [we need to know] where to seek help from."

Government, healthcare providers, schools, funders and community members all have a role to play in building this vision in consultation with young people, people from diverse backgrounds and those who have lived experience:

"Young people need to be involved and not in a tokenistic way, but actually meaningfully."

Young people said the Government should work to improve fairness in the healthcare sector so healthcare workers are no longer underpaid or undervalued. Healthcare workers' wellbeing should also be improved, with a better work-life balance, more NHS funding and less service inequalities. Young people suggested government should row back privatisation to make access fairer.

Young people also suggested government directs more funding towards high quality mental health services and supports improved local transport links to make services easier to reach. They should also make sport more accessible to people on low incomes, offer better free services, like dieticians, and tackle long-standing inequalities like period poverty. Importantly, young people also suggested

The impact of social media on mental health was discussed. Social media platforms can encourage unrealistic expectations and norms that, in turn, promote a culture of pressure. In young people's vision, these impacts are more limited and social media is more controlled, so they don't have to feel like they need to have achieved a certain amount by a certain age.

"There are so many pressures online; we need to limit these so we are protecting our mental health. Or it will get out of control."

offering personalised healthcare that considered people's backgrounds.

Education providers also have a role to play, according to young people. They said that to build future, healthy communities, schools should educate young people on mental health and ensure therapy services are available to all students. Schools should also teach about self-care and how to use methods like journaling to self-regulate emotions and manage stress.

"Schools need to emphasise the importance of mental health from a young age and offer therapy, so everyone feels supported. Mental health is also health."

Workplaces also need to adopt a more positive and healthy working culture for employees. Positive actions could include hybrid working and four-day working weeks.

Funders should invest in community activities to reach those who have the least access and support local communities' entertainment and sports. They should also create spaces for knowledge-sharing between generations and tackle the digital divide, particularly for the elderly. This would help them build community connections and improve wellbeing.



What the Co-op Foundation will do

We'll help to build healthy communities in 10 years' time by supporting organisations and individuals that:

- Support people to have good mental health through access to services and education.
- Enable us all to work together to protect and strengthen wellbeing.
- Support people to have good physical health and enable everyone to have the time and opportunity to exercise.



Sustainability in future, fair communities

The vision

"In 10 years, I would love to see a community built upon sustainability in all regards, to the point where it becomes a part of everyday life. I truly think that sustainability is a vital part of life that we must integrate into our future."

Throughout our visioning work, young people expressed strongly that future, fair communities built on co-operative values should be both sustainable and environmentally friendly. They talked in detail about key sustainability aspects related to energy, transport, waste, the man-made environment, public spaces, air quality, food and consumerism.

Young people emphasised that we would use less energy in their vision, and we'd depend more on renewable energy sources; this would help to mitigate the impacts of climate change. They also said renewables in the future would be made at a community level and used responsibly "only when needed" by local people.

Moreover, young people suggested that we'd use more environmentally friendly transport. This would include electric buses and electric cars. Community carpools and walking would also be more common.

Shopping and high streets were reimagined. In the future, people would shop differently. They'd recycle and reuse clothes and buy ethically produced clothes rather than fast fashion. High streets would be more community focused and made up of smaller, local,

sustainable businesses that sourced their products locally and ethically. They'd also act as community hubs for learning and sharing skills and food.

Young people envisioned that food would be grown locally, creating local jobs and community togetherness.

"There will be a shift away from meat production in favour of a greener diet, which is less taxing on the environment."

Young people also saw changes in how communities were built in the future through the lens of sustainability. They want spaces to be green to combat climate change and positively impact on physical and mental wellbeing. They said buildings would also be sustainable with a minimal environmental footprint, while our waste would be better disposed of too, with community recycling schemes and less plastic. Better tech and data would track what works, and what doesn't.

Overall, young people's vision is that sustainability is just a "part of life" in 2032 as we co-operate more than ever and use tools like ethical stewardship programmes to tackle issues like climate change.

"A day in this ideal community would be quite centred around being sustainable, but also being a valuable and active member of the community you live within."



Who can help turn this vision into reality, and how?

“I feel that the only way to achieve my community [of the future] is to refresh the system in place and give people the power they deserve.”

Young people suggested a range of tangible actions that government, schools, businesses, funders and individuals can take to create sustainable and environmentally friendly communities in 10 years' time.

They highlighted the need for people in positions of power, like government, to have strong values and a commitment to furthering sustainability. They also wanted more power to be distributed locally, so communities can make the changes they need, and for government to subsidise environmentally friendly housing through better insulation and heat pumps. Better labelling on the products we buy would also help people to make informed buying decisions.

Other governmental actions could include making environmental activism accessible to all and creating campaigns and events for sustainable ways of living. The Government could raise taxes on businesses that

have a negative environmental impact, and incentivise sustainable living, for example, by subsidising electric car costs. Greater overall transparency would mean those who impact negatively on the environment would be held accountable. The Government should also create more green spaces and regenerate high streets into community-focused, eco-positive spaces to boost the environment and build a greater sense of community.

Young people said schools can play their part, too, by introducing a green curriculum, vegetarian lunches and allotments.

Actions for businesses include using less plastic, reducing waste and transport used in goods production and sourcing more local suppliers. Supermarkets could also stock more eco-friendly products and reduce food waste while large brands would benefit from collaborating with trusted voices, such as scientists, to tackle misinformation on sustainability. Young people suggested supermarkets could also work harder to favour sustainable crop production.

“The way that crops are grown is also very harmful to the ground and means they will eventually make the soil unusable. To combat this, in 10 years, companies [should] try to only buy sustainable crops.”

Funders also have a role in building future sustainable communities. Actions include funding public spaces that are built with sustainable materials and supporting tree planting and playgrounds that encourage natural play.

Meanwhile, individuals should be empowered and educated to make the right decisions as consumers, particularly around fashion and waste. People individually and collectively will need to take accountability for their impact on the planet although more responsibility is lying on big corporations and government. Individuals should be self-motivated to consume less and use fewer resources.

“Lifestyle changes should have as little influence on the environment as possible while also attempting to replenish the resources we use. Little changes will have a massive impact in 10 years collectively.”



What the Co-op Foundation will do

We'll help to build sustainable communities in 10 years' time by supporting organisations and individuals that:

- Know about sustainable solutions, raise awareness of them, and put them into practice for a just transition.
- Come together to preserve and nurture local green spaces for the benefit of communities.



Youth activism, shared power and transparent governance in future, fair communities

The vision

“Young people have so much more to offer the world than they are given space to.”

In 10 years' time, young people want to see a democratic, fair and accountable government working within communities that are more aware and involved in politics. Their vision includes more opportunities for collective decision-making, and an honest, trustworthy relationship between community and leadership. The Government would also be diverse and focused on supporting communities that need it the most. They would provide more opportunities and access to resources for people from rural backgrounds and lower socio-economic groups.

“No vote will be 'wasted' and more voices can be heard.”

At a local level, young people looked forward to more transparent local government and citizens having a more active role in running communities, for example, through citizens' assemblies. Local authorities would allocate young people funds and tasks as a way of giving them power to shape their communities. For decision-making, more diverse perspectives would be sought and consultants from under-represented groups, such as disabled people, would provide advice and get paid for their time.

“Citizens' assemblies are common in parks, in living rooms and in public meeting halls.”

There would also be more opportunities for funding community projects and increased dissemination of funding opportunities for young people to collaborate in their local area. Young people looked forward to being more actively involved in policymaking and having more leadership opportunities. This could include youth councils, participating in community development and leading projects. Education in leadership skills and financial literacy would prepare young people for a more active role in their community and politics.

Some young people also explained that they feel disenfranchised by current politics and that the current voting age doesn't allow them to influence politics.

“In my future community, there would be youth councils to promote responsibility and [they would] give young people power to help change or shape their communities. They will be given areas of responsibility by the local council to vote and decide on, and if they have any important things they need to raise, they can ask to have a word with the local council.”

“Having youth boards within government to hear young people's opinions.”



Who can help turn this vision into reality, and how?

“I think youth-led things are extremely important because they allow a more accurate representation of what young people actually want rather than what those around them perceive as their wants.”

Young people identified a range of changes that needed to happen to improve governance, shared power and youth activism.

Young people wanted government to be more transparent about finances and less likely to make decisions with a financial motive in mind. Young people also suggested more power should be devolved to local levels, and more people, including young people, needed to get interested in politics.

“Local councils can facilitate this by involving younger members of the community in decision-making, and actively seeking opinions from young people as to whether the right decisions are being made for a sustainable future.”

Youth leadership was seen as an essential factor in driving positive change. Participants in our focus groups said young people should be given platforms of influence so their voices are heard, including opportunities for online activism. This should start in places where young people are, for example, in schools and universities. Schools could have school councils, and universities can work on having a strong university union, which listens to young people and their views.

“Young people should be listened to where young people matter the most, within the places they spend the most time. These are schools and universities. They should have a say in things that directly impact them.”

To create stronger youth leadership, young people said they'll need safe and open spaces to share their opinions and better education on issues like politics, voting, confidence and leadership. They asked for changes in the national curriculum, informed by young people, and funding allocated to teach new topics and subjects.

“Education will play an essential role in giving young people the skills and versatility to become change agents. This will focus on developing the attributes and traits which are applicable in youth leadership; for example, compassion understanding and compromise, and how to deal with difficult or sensitive situations.”

Charities have a lot to offer in terms of providing opportunities for youth leadership, for example, by inviting young people to be members of their boards and contributing to their governance. It is important that these opportunities are disseminated as widely as possible to reach different demographics of young people.

Young people demanded more equitable and inclusive access to policymaking by listening to people outside the parliament. Diversity should be encouraged in positions of power so young people can look up to those they relate to, while companies should actively boost the voices of under-represented groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, women and ethnic minorities.

“We need to listen to everyone, especially those who are more likely to be penalised in society, such as LGBTQ+, ethnic minorities and even women. This would help shift the power dynamic because the people would be given a voice rather than blindly following the Government.”

Some young people believed the voting age should be lowered to encourage more of their peers to vote for someone they resonate with. Other young people disagreed because they were concerned this would encourage parents to steer their children's voting choices. Because of this, young people thought voting at 16 should be made optional, so people could opt-in to do this.

What the Co-op Foundation will do

We'll help to build communities in 10 years' time that prioritise youth activism, shared power and transparent governance. We'll do this by supporting organisations and individuals that:

- Educate young people from diverse backgrounds in leadership and politics, and enable them to be involved in decision-making.
- Enable young people to self-organise, find resources and get into positions of power to co-create solutions to issues that matter to them.

Conclusion

“Real change starts from the ground up, from the roots to the flower. Little changes within communities today can easily add up and create a huge impact on our communities in the future.”

What would a community look like in 10 years’ time if it was fair and built on co-operative values?

This was the question we asked almost 100 young people to examine as part of our two-month series of focus groups and WhatsApp diaries in May and June 2022. Their insight and their experiences fill this report and form the bedrock of the Co-op Foundation's Future Communities Vision for our new 2022-27 strategy, 'Building communities of the future together'.

Young people were invited to envision a positive, ideal future community. Some participants found no difficulty imagining and articulating a future full of hope. Others found it hard to think of a positive future and considered what the difficulties our societies face nowadays might exacerbate. It was also expressed that a fair community would be a changing community. That being ‘perfect’ in a new world would mean accepting that change has to keep happening to look after all of society.

Overall, young people expressed a vision of a future world where positive change will happen and more decision-making powers go to local levels. They also expressed caring about the global community. Young people related to the co-operative values and interpreted them by associating them with their personal experiences. More importantly, they talked about the power of collective action and spirit and acknowledged the benefits of the co-operative model of organising a society in the future. They suggested that co-operative approaches should be a vital part of building future communities. This could range from co-operative businesses and schools to co-operative housing that meets the needs and requirements of all.

Young people focused their Future Communities Vision on six priority areas:

- Reflecting the cost-of-living crisis, young people said future, fair communities were **prosperous and afforded fair access to opportunity**. The pandemic has impacted them, too, as young people prioritised a healthy work-life balance and satisfying jobs in their vision alongside better opportunities for their peers who don’t come from privileged backgrounds.
- **Safety** in future communities with reduced crime and meaningful rehabilitation for offenders was also paramount. Young people said ideal communities in 10 years’ time ‘felt safe’ with well-lit neighbourhoods and no sexual harassment on the streets.
- Future communities that are **diverse, equitable and inclusive** was a recurring theme for the young people we spoke to. Black Lives Matter and #MeToo were regularly referenced as inspiration during our discussions, alongside the need for more substantial support to areas, communities and individuals that need it the most.
- The aspirations of young people for future **healthy** communities were influenced by their experiences during the pandemic.

Participants said the impact of lockdowns raised awareness of mental health issues. Issues around social media and how they put pressure on young people’s lives and their mental health were highlighted, as young people called for a future community where social media will be more controlled, and where they will feel safe online.

- **Sustainable** communities were also aspired to in 10 years’ time by the young people we spoke to. Climate change is a topic high on the public agenda across the world, and young people have played a crucial role in raising its profile. For the future, they expect to see greater use of renewable energy and emphasised that governments, corporations and individuals all have a responsibility to adopt more environmentally friendly practices.
- And finally, in line with our co-operative values of self-help, solidarity and self-responsibility, young people envisioned future communities that promote **youth activism, shared power and transparent governance**. It is they who wish to lead us into a better future with movements that start from the ground up and that bring about change effectively for a just transition.

Thank you to every young person who took part in our visioning exercise. Now it is over to us at the Co-op Foundation as well as other funders, governments, businesses and adults everywhere to turn this into reality. We hope to keep working with young people to track our progress and to ensure that in 10 years’ time, communities are fairer, more co-operative and, ultimately, better places to thrive.

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