

Cross-Party Group on Credit Unions

Minutes of the meeting held at 5.45pm on Wednesday 2 March 2016 in Committee Room 6, The Scottish Parliament

Present

John Wilson MSP (Convener), Frank McKillop (Secretary), Dr Richard Simpson MSP, Trisha Butler (Drumchapel Community CU), Tony Carter (Kingdom CU), Alice Connelly (Wishaw CU), Andrew Forsyth (Scottish Government), Bobby Gould (CUNA Mutual), Karen Hurst (ABCUL), Jim Lally (Education Scotland), Rose Mavin (Wishaw CU), Nancy MacGillivray (ACE), Kenny MacLeod (Scotwest CU), Grace McGinnity (Kilsyth & Villages CU), Liz McVey (StepChange Scotland), Charles Meehan (Dalmuir CU), Dr Robbie Mochrie (Heriot-Watt University), Dermot O'Neill (SLCU), Laura Sneddon (Accountant in Bankruptcy), Alex Spence (Capital CU), Jim Suddon (Capital CU), Billy Thomson (West Lothian CU)

Apologies

Anne McTaggart MSP (Deputy Convener), Jackie Baillie MSP, Claudia Beamish MSP, Kezia Dugdale MSP, Mary Fee MSP, Neil Findlay MSP, Patrick Harvie MSP, Hugh Henry MSP, Jim Hume MSP, James Kelly MSP, Johann Lamont MSP, Jenny Marra MSP, Mark McDonald MSP, Mary Scanlon MSP, Drew Smith MSP, Jean Urquhart MSP, Allison Barnes (Money Advice Service), Graham Burnside (Shepherd & Wedderburn LLP), Norman Crawford (Let's Build Credit Unions), Steven Cunningham (Alexander Sloan), Gerry Docherty (East Kilbride CU), Chris Donald (PRA), Karen Hunter (Church of Scotland), Robert Kelly (NHS CU), John McClay (West Lothian CU), Richard McCreedy (Co-operative Party), Fergus Muirhead (Writer & Broadcaster), Charles Sim (Churches Mutual CU), Carolann Smillie (Lanarkshire CU), Donald Urquhart (Capital CU)

- 1 The Convener welcomed all to the final meeting of the CPG in the current Parliamentary session.
- 2 Attendance and apologies were noted as above.
- 3 Minutes of the meeting held on 25/11/15 were read, moved as correct by Alex Spence, seconded by Charles Meehan, and agreed. There were no matters arising.
- 4 The Convener introduced the main topic, which was a discussion of the Scottish Government's report: *Credit Unions: Investing in our Future*. A number of members of the Scottish Government's Credit Union Working Group were asked to start the discussion with their reflections on the report, followed by a general discussion. Points made included:
 - We shouldn't be complacent about a Government Minister taking such a close interest in the credit union movement. This is a tribute to the work of the CPG and the movement in growing the profile and credibility of credit unions in recent years;
 - It was refreshing that the credit union movement was asked for its views on what would be sustainable and beneficial support - and the movement was listened to;
 - The Scottish Government's view of credit unions has changed even in the space of a couple of years, and they seem to be on the right page in terms of genuinely productive support for the movement;
 - The diversity of the Scottish credit union movement is rightly recognised and celebrated;
 - Savings and access to contingency funds is vital to financial health, and credit unions have a key role to play in this space;
 - The report is evidence of a maturing credit union movement, as it is not begging for funding, but instead identifying what our sector can do to build financial health and boost the Scottish economy;
 - The report challenges credit unions to do their bit and make the most of their opportunities;
 - It was encouraging to see a compelling business case for employers to partner with credit unions being made, rather than a focus on credit union relationships solely as part of corporate social responsibility;

- The report's recognition of the need to engage young people with credit unions is welcome, and poses a challenge to get better at using new technology and social media;
- We need to establish what really works in financial education. Social media has the scope to generate positive peer pressure to change behaviours;
- Credit unions need to find a way to bridge the gap between school and higher or further education. Very few students even think about credit unions when they require a loan;
- University funding has been secured for a project to help community credit unions engage with employers;
- We can learn from other credit union movements around the world that have walked the same path and learned the lessons before us;
- There is a challenge to credit unions to be more business-like, while still retaining their member focus;
- Co-operation between credit unions is key to the movement's continued growth.

The Convener thanked all for their contributions to a lively discussion. He stated his own satisfaction that the CPG has been able to engage both the Finance Secretary and the Business Minister with the credit union movement throughout the current Parliament, and that his own priority of Government listening to credit unions and allowing the movement to shape policy has been broadly achieved.

He noted the success of the recent Scottish Parliamentary conference and hoped it might be possible to hold such an event biannually. The conference report will be sent to four Parliamentary committees and should be included in the legacy papers of two committees for consideration as the focus of inquiries in the next Parliament. It was noted that all parties in the Parliament hold a positive, supportive view of credit unions, which means the sector should be pushing at an open door regardless of the election result.

5 AOCB:

Tony Carter asked about a director induction pack. He was advised to contact his trade body.

6 The Convener noted that this was the last meeting of the CPG before the dissolution of Parliament for the election. He explained that efforts would have to be made to re-form the Group following the election, but he was confident that the breadth of cross-party support for credit unions would ensure the Group's continuation.

The Convener thanked Frank McKillop of ABCUL for serving as the Group's Secretariat, and thanked all the MSPs and regular attendees for making the CPG such a success. The Convener was then thanked for his support for the movement, including his chairing of the CPG, raising credit union issues in Parliament, engaging with the movement and organising the recent conference.

7 The Convener thanked all for their attendance and closed the meeting.