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## PRESS RELEASE

# Barrow enterprise The Schools' Energy Co-operative wins national business award

Barrow-based enterprise, The Schools' Energy Co-operative Ltd, has scooped a prestigious national business accolade – taking home the prize for the “Inspiring Co-op of the Year” at the Co-operative of the Year Awards.

Chair of the Co-op Mike Smyth and Project Director Laura Moreno were presented with their award at a gala dinner during Co-op Congress, the sector's annual conference, which was celebrating its landmark 150th year.

Organised by sector body Co-operatives UK and supported by The Co-operative Bank, the annual awards are a celebration of excellence and achievement in the co-op sector.

The Schools' Energy Co-op Ltd was launched in 2014 to provide community sourced funding for solar panel systems on schools. It has since installed panels on 50 schools all over the country, providing them with a sustainable solar-powered electricity supply and engaging both the local community and students in its projects. It also has a pipeline of further projects which it hopes to install in the next few months.

Speaking after the announcement Mike Smyth said “I am absolutely delighted that we have won the award for most Inspiring Co-op and grateful to everybody who voted for us. I certainly didn't expect us to win as we are a relatively small co-op and we were up against some much larger organisations. I think we won because the public recognised and identified with our core mission which is to help schools tackle climate change by generating renewable energy but also to support them financially in their educational and environmental work.”

The co-op scooped the prize after a public vote which saw numerous organisations and individuals shortlisted in six categories. A record 33,000 votes were cast across all the categories, with nominations and votes coming from large and small businesses, members, customers and co-operators across the sector.

The record year for the awards also saw the introduction of two new categories for individual co-operators: the Co-operator of the Year Award and the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Other winners were The Co-op Group, South Tyneside Council and Bristol Wood Recycling Project. Individual awards went to Leeds Bread Co-op's Lorraine Power for Co-operator of the Year, and Daily Bread Co-op founder Roger Sawtell, who won the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Ed Mayo, Secretary General of Co-operatives UK, said: "The Co-op of the Year Awards is always a special occasion. And once again, worthy winners have taken home the coveted prizes. The Schools' Energy Co-operative Ltd – and all our winners and nominees – are an outstanding example of how working co-operatively creates opportunity, prosperity and meaningful work, and brings social and economic benefits to communities and businesses throughout the country."

**Maria Cearns Managing Director, Current Accounts and Savings from sponsors The Co-operative Bank, said:** "What a great evening celebrating the achievements of a number of co-op organisations over the last year. A huge well done to all the nominees – for doing valuable, essential work growing the UK's co-operative economy and using the power of co-operation to enable businesses to flourish in a fair and equitable way. Congratulations to the winners who thoroughly deserved their awards."

**– Ends –**

#### **Contact**

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**The Schools' Energy Co-op Limited** is on a mission to enable all the country's schools to have solar panels if they wish. The co-op partners with local environmental groups, parents' associations, local authorities and multi-academy trusts. After paying interest at a fair and capped rate to its funding members, the co-operative then distributes its entire surplus to member schools, trading successfully and profitably where projects are financed through share offers that are promoted locally.

**Co-operatives UK** is the network for Britain's thousands of co-operatives. Together we work to promote, develop and unite member-owned businesses across the economy. From high street retailers to community owned pubs, fan owned football clubs to farmer controlled businesses, co-operatives are everywhere and together they are worth £36 billion to the British economy.

**The Co-operative Bank** is the only UK high street bank with a customer-led ethical policy and the bank is committed to values and ethics in line with the principles of the co-operative movement. The Co-operative Bank is proud to sponsor The Hive; a programme of support for new and existing co-operatives, created by Co-operatives UK. Together, we're giving like-minded people, innovators and groups the support they need to succeed. Helping to build a successful and resilient co-operative economy.