THIS WAS
TOMORROW

BRYN

Lead of finance at Kitty's Launderette

In conversation with Enrico Policardo
Kitty's Launderette, Anfield, Liverpool
2026

Edited from the recorded conversation.

01 Who are you, and what is Kitty's?

I'm Bryn. I was born in Croydon, in South London, and moved up here for university. I just happened to live next door to Kitty's Launderette when the idea was first bubbling. I went to one community meeting, and then got a job at the launderette a month or so after it opened. It's become quite a beautiful place. It's changed me so much. I think it's the main reason I'm the person I am, and happy as the person I am.

It's a workers' co-operative, a community laundry, a non-profit, a community space - as well as a self-service laundry, a commercial laundry and a dry cleaner's. We do laundry deliveries now too, which is great. We run events and activities for adults and children, we do outreach. And there's another arm that develops policy ideas for government - about workers' rights, or how to spend public money to create better jobs in communities. So it's very multifaceted. It's a non-hierarchical workplace: there are no bosses. A few people lead on different areas - I lead on the accounts and bookkeeping - but everyone has a hand in all the different parts of the business, and in both the activism side and the business side. So people learn a lot.

02 How is it connected to Homebaked?

It was spawned out of it. Grace, who founded it with a bunch of other artists, was part of a creative activist network called Between the Borders. So it's very much born out of the Homebaked idea, and supported by Homebaked. We wouldn't be here without the work the CLT did before us.

03 What's the social impact here?

Everton and Anfield are among the most deprived neighbourhoods in Europe, next to Kensington, another of the most deprived. People really struggle financially. The cost of living hits harder here than anywhere. And I think

one of the main reasons people get into debt in the UK is financing white goods - your washing machine, fridge, oven. So we tackle that directly, through our free washing scheme and subsidised self-service laundry. We subsidise it through the business, and with grants. Hygiene poverty is quite hidden. But you can safely assume that if people are struggling with food, they'll eat before they clean themselves. So hygiene poverty is as bad as, or worse than, food poverty - which means the figures are really severe.

Then there's the stadium. Being next to Anfield means the whole area has become an investment tool for local and foreign investors - the short-stay, Airbnb industry. So there's a weird inflation of property prices that isn't reflected in the quality of the homes or the area. We've walked around: no third spaces, nowhere good to eat, things closed most of the week. Why should these houses be valued like the south end of the city? So part of what we do is get into that economic activity and extract as much as we can from it. Airbnbs and hotels come to us for their bedding and linen. Tourists come in and we do their laundry. There's a lot of money circulating round that stadium, and we want to get into those flows and redirect the money into good jobs and support schemes for people who live here. And we want to replicate what we do, and support other businesses to do the same.

04 A launderette used to be a third space - a place to meet. How do you help people make the most of it?

Kitty's is named after Kitty Wilkinson, who created the first wash house in the UK. So we're very aware of the old wash houses. Lots of older customers tell us what it was like at the wash house on Frederick Street, how it was a social space. We brought back the tea and toast - you saw us handing out toast today. That was inspired by an old picture of a lady handing someone a cup of tea and a very thick slice of toast. You can't get toast that thick any more, unfortunately.

On education, we try to do it through the way we talk about the space, by educating the staff, and through events and activities. My colleague Anthony has moved from events into a new community role, and he's amazing. He goes out to other organisations, shares what we know, and brings them in to do activities with us. He has an amazing way of talking to people openly and honestly about what they're struggling with. Then he comes back and finds ways for us as an organisation to support another organisation, or an individual family.

And I always repeat this: what's really beautiful about a launderette is that everybody can access it. It's not like a café, where only certain people come in for food or coffee. Everybody needs to wash their clothes. And because we're tapped into the Airbnbs, we also get wealthier people. So every kind of person comes in, which gives you a very rare opportunity to get to know people from many backgrounds - their opinions, what makes them tick. We try our best to use all that learning to decide how we go forward.

05 What would someone need in place to replicate this?

I'm really bought into the workers' co-op model of non-hierarchy, especially in small businesses - sociocracy, democratic ways of organising. We have monthly team meetings with rounds, so everyone speaks on a topic, and people bring up things that need to change. Everyone's constantly encouraged to voice their opinion. And we're all paid the same. Some people have more responsibility, but because we're all paid the same, it's on you to shape the business - not on somebody else because they're paid more. It's everybody's responsibility, and that really taps into people's values. So: a real focus on democracy, and on treating people properly. It takes a lot of soft skills, and they can be learned.

06 Did you always know it would be a co-op?

Before I joined, I think it was undecided whether it would be a social enterprise or a co-operative. A social enterprise is an organisation with social aims, non-profit; a co-op can make a profit. We committed to a co-operative. And in reality it was difficult at first. There were problems in the first few years, because we took on people who'd worked thirty, forty years in hierarchical workplaces, and now you're telling them to be fully switched on and find the answers to problems in themselves. That's really confronting.

It took a lot of learning. Only about a year after Covid did it really click. We switched the culture: we've got the people in, now we really invest in our staff. We brought in coaching training and counselling training, and therapy. We revamped the team meetings and the board. Since then, it takes a new person about four months to really get it. Then they see that when they voice their opinion, things happen, and it's empowering. Slowly they start to shed the damage from hierarchical workplaces, and it's beautiful to watch. The moment someone realises: actually, I can just ask for a meeting. I don't have to wait for someone else to solve the problem. I own the problem, I find the solution, and I feel really good about it. I love seeing those little moments.

07 How can communities go from a vision to actually doing it?

I've been thinking about this recently. You need space, obviously. I was reading about Kowloon Walled City, where apparently there was an organising hall at the bottom where people would meet and lobby the government. And there's a housing co-op on the other side of the city that did something similar. Scaling those structures up to a street or a neighbourhood, having somewhere people can regularly meet - a dedicated space like a central terraced house, or just always going to the same café, or someone's house. Space first.

That's the hardest bit, because everything's so expensive. In the UK it's so hard to get material change. Communities can rent a place and get kicked out when the rent goes up. It's really difficult to get a building and run it not-for-profit. So everyone's transient, constantly moving, and whatever they build gets destroyed. That's where I see the launderette going in the future, working with the CLT to get buildings. Us with our deep knowledge of democratic organising, the CLT as specialists in renovating and retrofitting and bringing buildings into community ownership. Together we could have a dedicated space - a community café or workspace - where every couple of weeks we invite local activist groups, or anyone thinking of doing something, introduce them to democratic ways of organising, sharing opinions and solving problems, and then raise some money and make real things happen.

08 Is it hard to engage people? When do they click?

It's different for everybody. You have to accept that people buy in differently. How can I ask a single mum to buy into activism as much as me, with no dependants? But if people buy in enough to always come in with a positive mindset, support their co-workers, get things done, and be constructive about solving problems - that's enough of a click for me.

It's easier for us because we provide jobs, and a lot of contact time inside a space that's quite politically active. Customers have all sorts of ideas about what we are. Some think we just do free washing. Some think we're just a commercial laundry, or a dry cleaner's. Some people in Parliament probably think we're a policy-writing outfit. But when people have regular conversations with others whose values roughly align, they nearly always come round to wanting to make a change in the area.

Ethical shopping is hard to get people into, because what difference does it make to their life day to day, apart from more money leaving their bank? But at the launderette, people who didn't know anything about co-ops, and maybe

still don't care much about ethical business, see people from disadvantaged backgrounds joining the workforce and really benefiting. We see customers who are really struggling come in, and just being in that energy is another chance to support them, to signpost them. We can change people's lives through that contact, because they need to come in every week. Someone might be a bit wobbly with their mental health, and we might worry, but they'll probably be back next week, and we'll have another conversation, and move them slightly towards a better life or a better perspective.

And sometimes people come in with opinions about migrants that are just straight-out racist. We don't ban them straight away. We have conversations. They get to know us as people - the "loony lefties", as people say round here - and at the end of the day we're nice people who want the best for the area. That softens them a bit, and it opens a channel: maybe it's not about the migrants. Maybe it's about the American who owns the stadium, or the foreign investors buying up the houses. And then you can introduce them to co-ops and CLTs. They won't have the same buy-in as me, spending twenty hours a week in the launderette. But at least they have some idea there's an alternative, which is enough for me.

09 What makes you really happy in life?

Football. And hanging around with people who inspire me. Playing football, and, like a normal fella, my emotions are completely tied to my team. I'm an Arsenal fan, so it's a good year for us - maybe. We've got the last Premier League game next week, then the Champions League final the week after. It's twenty years since I was a little boy, the last time we won anything really. I'm going down to London for the final, and there'll be a parade the day after.

I coach as well. I used to coach a range of ages for a semi-professional team in Liverpool. Now I coach for a trans-inclusive football team. I see football as a real way in, especially in the UK, because it's so baked into the culture,

especially for men. Men can be very hard to reach with politics or community organising, or emotions in general. Football reaches them.

It's very difficult, because in the UK all the land is privatised, so there's an instant cost barrier to providing football. And Liverpool and Manchester are probably the most talented areas for football in the country - the culture's so strong that people prioritise it. There's a community organisation I love, at Tiber, with a youth football club that coaches kids from four right up to sixteen. A few of the coaches have been there for decades. Anyone growing up round there will play there at some point, and the coaches get to know the families and have a way of supporting them. I don't see many organisations that are connected to people for that long. If you're looking for community in those areas, getting to know those people is really important.

10 Is this the future you were dreaming of?

It's a little island of it here, I think. The launderette's ability to settle people, to calm them in very chaotic lives, to give them something positive to hold on to, is amazing. And it's doable. We rely somewhat on grants, but if we get the mix right we can sustain it. If it's a model we can replicate, I definitely think it's the way forward - community ownership not just of the building, but of how it's run and improved. Because it's so connected to people on the ground. It's never top-down, and that's how it should be. Community spaces and land for communities, always. Government, local government and local organisations should serve communities, and communities should have the tools to serve themselves. It's just a long way to get there.

11 Would you have imagined being here, in 2026, five or ten years ago?

[…] I don't think too much about the future. But maybe. The launderette, the way it is, is so separate from the chaos of local government that I think it'll survive - it has to. Whatever the political environment around it, as long as we can balance our books, we'll be there to support the community. A place where people come without fear of judgement or harm, and get their washing done.

This Was Tomorrow – Is This the Future We Were Dreaming Of?
A long-term audio-visual investigation by Enrico Policardo.
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