



central COOP

INTERIM REPORT  
2023

Creating a sustainable Society for all

# Our Family of Businesses



\* Restated: 253 Food Stores also as at year-end.

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**MESSAGE  
FROM OUR  
PRESIDENT**  
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# About Us

We are a **successful, independent, community-based co-operative** owned by our Members.




WE  
EMPLOY  
**7,500+**  
PEOPLE

OUR HERITAGE  
DATES  
BACK ALMOST  
**175**  
YEARS

We invest 1% of our trading surplus into **supporting local groups and good causes** through our Community Dividend Fund




OUR MEMBERS  
AND CUSTOMERS  
ARE AT THE  
HEART OF OUR  
BUSINESS

We are guided by the **internationally recognised** co-operative values:

- ✓ Self-help
- ✓ Self-responsibility
- ✓ Democracy
- ✓ Equity
- ✓ Equality
- ✓ Solidarity

WE  
TRADE IN  
**21**  
COUNTIES

WE OPERATE  
OVER  
**460**  
TRADING  
OUTLETS



# Our Overall Society Scorecard

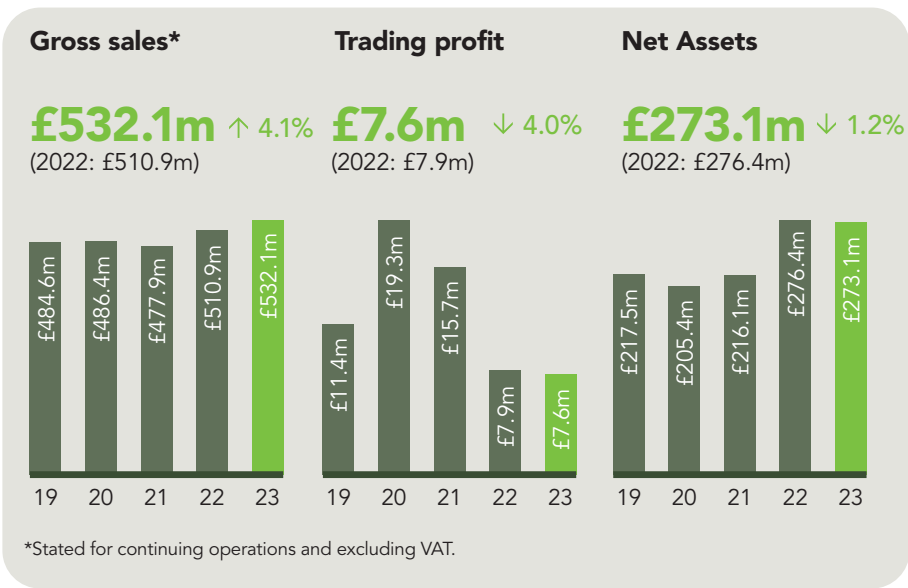
Our Society Scorecard supports our purpose to create a sustainable Society for all and our strategic priorities:

Green Energy Self Sufficiency, Young People and Membership.

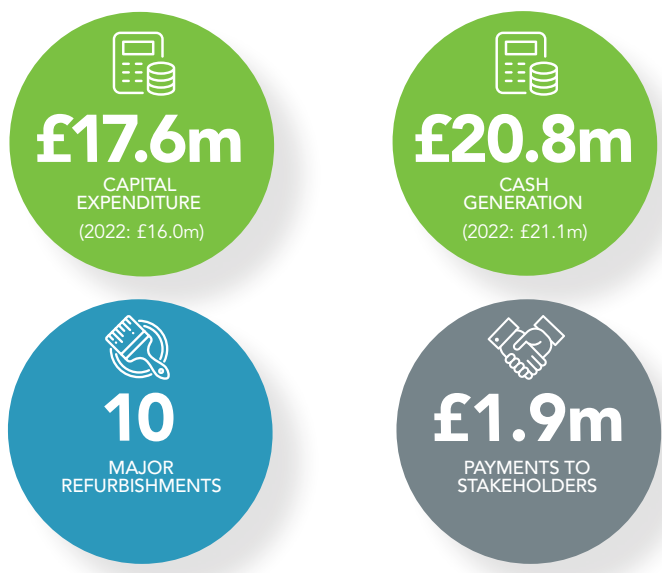




# Interim Financial Highlights



## Growing our business . . .



## Our Society Highlights





## Membership

Earlier this year we launched our Membership mobile app, so far the app has been download over 115,000 times. Work continues to provide new functionality through the app, to encourage engagement and participation. The next phase of development is due to launch later this year.



In July we began a comprehensive research project to shape the future of Membership. Over 3,000 Members, customers and colleagues had their say and shared their views on what makes Membership meaningful to them.

## Young people Work experience

Supporting young people in our communities is in our DNA and aligns to our core values and principles. In March 2023, we pledged to offer 300 work experience opportunities and provide employability activities to an additional 1,500 young people. Since March, we've offered 61 work experience placements and provided employability support to 710 young people through our Adopt a School activities, or via the work delivered by the Membership & Community Relations team in our communities. Momentum is building against the targets and we're looking at new ways to connect with schools and colleges such as T-Level placements, work trials or new activities within the Adopt a School toolkit.



## Debt free degree launch

Our newly launched debt-free degree apprenticeships are a fantastic way to 'earn and learn'. With the cost-of-living crisis, not everyone can afford to go to University and Level 6 degree equivalent qualifications offer an inclusive approach to gain degrees, whilst also providing succession and talent pipelines within our Society. In June, we launched our first ever Business Management Degree Apprenticeship programme, attracting over 120 applications from both internal



## Our Society Highlights continued



and external talent. We made seven offers (five in retail and two in funeral) and our new apprentices will commence in role in September 2023, on a three-year programme of supported learning. Additionally, we created a brochure showcasing other Level 6/7 degree equivalent apprenticeship qualifications for internal talent, which will be launched on our new careers centre hub in September 2023 – a one-stop place for all our colleagues to understand more about career progression and what's available to them.

### **Apprenticeships**

Apprenticeships are a fantastic and cost-effective way to upskill talent and develop the skills for the future, as well as, providing our colleagues with opportunities to gain qualifications. This year, we've built more awareness of apprenticeships among our leaders and promoted awareness of National Apprenticeship Week in February 2023 to help springboard this journey. As a result, we launched our first Level 2 Funeral Apprenticeship programme to develop early talent and combat recruitment challenges seen in our funeral business.



Additionally, we have created new external apprenticeship opportunities across many Support Centre teams, which provide entry level roles with clear career paths for progression. We currently have 67 apprentices undertaking apprenticeships with an additional 27 expected to graduate in the next six months.



## Magic Breakfasts

Our partnership with Magic Breakfasts, a charity tackling food insecurity aimed to end hunger as a barrier to education in six schools within our communities, helped to deliver 60,000 breakfasts to schools in need within our communities.



## Journey to green energy self-sufficiency

As we continue our journey to green energy self-sufficiency, we're working to benchmark our Scope 1, 2 and 3 carbon emissions data, to help us set science-based targets for us to work towards achieving Net Zero and beyond, to self-sufficiency.

So far on this journey, we've completed 64 sites in our solar rollout programme. These installations have already produced a total of **1,488,060.20 kWh** in their lifetime and, we expect to have completed solar roll out on 170 sites by the end of the current financial year.

In funeral, we've dedicated investment into green energy via our vehicle fleet with our first three fully electric ambulances, which complement our existing electric vehicle fleet of 11 pool cars. We are expecting receipt of

two electric hearses and four electric limousines in the autumn.

In our food stores, we have made a significant investment of £8.9m in electronic shelf edge labels, to improve efficiencies, generate cost-savings and reduce paper in our stores for the benefit of our colleagues, customers and Members.

Reducing food waste remains a key component in our sustainability work, our ongoing partnership with Too Good To Go has seen 65,211 Magic Bags distributed, saving 163 tonnes of carbon.



**115,000**  
APP  
DOWNLOADS

# A Message from our President

Elaine Dean

# We will continue to do **whatever it takes** to keep colleagues safe.

## **Dear Members**

I am absolutely delighted to be back on the Board after my 'good governance' year out. From 2014, we all have to take a minimum of one year out now every nine years. In 2022, Marta Mayhew, Richard Bickle and myself, stood down and Marta took the decision to retire but Richard and I sought re-election in 2023 and were successful. This year Maria Lee, Sue Rushton and Dave Ellgood were required to stand down and we have two new Board members join us in Maryann Denfhy and Bob Burlton and they are very welcome.



I was even more honoured when my Board colleagues took the decision to elect me as President again after my previous term (2017–20) and this time I am very pleased to have Richard Bickle alongside me as Vice President.

I would like to pay tribute to my successor and predecessor as President, Jane Avery, who led the Society through the challenging pandemic years whilst going through a very difficult time personally; she did a fine job. Thanks also to Tanya Noon who supported her as Vice President over the last year.

So the Board continues to work hard leading the Society through some very difficult trading times and under some extremely challenging circumstances with the superb help of our professional executive team and senior management.

## **Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities**

It has been very widely publicised that shoplifting and abuse against retail workers has increased exponentially and since my return in May I have been focussing very much on how we can keep our colleagues safe and what we can do to ensure the law is actually enforced and that the constabulary



attend incidents. I was shocked to learn that in 71% of cases there is no immediate police response to some incidents and so we have been concentrating on getting lawmakers and law enforcers to understand exactly HOW our colleagues feel when they are threatened, spat at, pushed, abused and much more.

Working initially with the then Shadow Minister for Levelling Up, Nottingham North's Labour and Co-operative MP Alex Norris we have been inviting MPs, prospective MPs, sitting and prospective Police and Crime Commissioners and others to come into our stores and LISTEN to how our colleagues feel when they go home after a difficult day of such behaviour.

We have also put extra measures in place to keep our colleagues safe and continue to review each store with further investment planned. We have policies in place to calm situations and not escalate the aggravation and there are other measures going into stores.

The Board and the Executive are absolutely determined to make abuse, assault and shoplifting socially unacceptable and we will continue to do whatever it takes to keep colleagues

safe and the workplace a secure and happy environment.

I make no apologies for taking up so much space in this report on this subject and am sure our Members and customers support our actions because they too want to shop in a secure and stress free environment. We are also working closely on this with the Midcounties Co-operative and the Co-operative Group.

### **Meaningful Member Engagement**

The Board continues to support inclusion and diversity with regular events and support for Pride across our area and we are pleased that it has been possible to reward Members with lower prices on popular items on a regular basis in our efforts to help with the cost-of-living crisis. We continue to support food banks across our trading areas and to co-operate with other co-operatives.

Members also have opportunities to join in activities which are on offer across most of our trading areas and we know that our Member groups, classes and visits provide social opportunities and for many help to combat isolation and loneliness. Please contact the Member and Community Relations Officer for your area if you wish to know what is happening.



# A Message from our President continued

As we open new stores in new areas we will be looking over the next six months as to how we can introduce Member activities which are accessible to all in more isolated areas and ensure that all Members have the chance to join in as they all own a share of our Society.

We continue to hold highly successful events around International Women's Day and International Men's Day with motivational speakers and thought provoking and interesting workshops. As we open more cafes alongside our stores we are hoping to use them as community spaces for smaller groups and activities. We sincerely welcome offers by Members to help run interest groups – a recent new group in Derby featuring tatting is attracting new Members for example. If you have a skill or an interest you could share please get in touch. We are also receptive to new ideas for classes or activities.

Our Retired Employees Associations receive our support and we would like to see more start up across our trading areas. It's lovely to see the camaraderie among former work colleagues at the many events that they run and we would welcome more activity in Leicester, Peterborough, Birmingham and East Anglia. If you are a retired employee interested in joining or setting up such a group, please get in touch. It is important that we recognise the service that retired colleagues gave to build up the highly successful Society we have today. We are but custodians of our Society and we hope to build it better and stronger to hand it on in the fullness of time.

Many of our new stores are now further away from our traditional areas; we have opened wonderful new stores in the north west, in Yorkshire and even in Essex. Every new store seems to feature some new innovation to provide a true community hub.

We also work well and have excellent relationships with neighbouring societies and even ones that are further away. We continue to make presentations at conferences and generally aim to be the go-to co-op in the UK for meaningful Membership ideas and overall 'co-oppiness'.

## **Our Business**

Of course all of these wonderful things cannot happen if we are not successful in our business and so the Board, with its various committees for oversight and challenge, ensures that we can keep moving forward as a business and keep ahead of the game. The Audit & Risk Committee does fine work in ensuring we comply with all requirements and double check the implementation of our policies. The Search Committee ensures that the Board is evaluated and appraised on an annual basis and other committees oversee other aspects of running a co-operative business.

As President I give a commitment to get out and about as much as possible and to visit stores and funeral homes and meet colleagues. Our business could not survive without the brilliant loyalty of those we employ to serve our Members and, as a Board, we really appreciate that.

Over the last few years we have lost many co-operators and we remember them with gratitude and affection. We were deeply sorry to hear of the death in July of our former Board Independent Non-Executive Director 2014–22, solicitor Rachel Wilkinson. We also record sadness at the deaths of former Directors Rod Findlay and Barry Dale.

In conclusion, thank you to my Board colleagues for their confidence in me, to the executive and senior management of the Society, to the brilliant Member & Community Relations teams and to YOU the Members for your continuing loyalty to a modern, successful co-operative business of which you are a part owner.

*Elaine Dean*

**Elaine Dean**

President from 18 May 2023



# A Message from our Chief Executive

Debbie Robinson

## 2023 is another challenging year.

Hello there everyone, I hope you and your loved ones are well and keeping safe during these challenging times.

Thank you to our Difference Makers – our wonderful colleagues who continue to put Members and customers at the heart of everything that we do. By working together with purpose, taking care in our communities, and striving to be better every day, we can mark our very special co-operative difference, creating a sustainable Society for all for the benefit of our Members, customers, and colleagues.

A big thank you to our Members and customers for your continued loyalty in our stores, funeral homes, and for your participation in our local communities. Thank you to our Board for its steadfast guardianship, support, and strategic direction, in its commitment to both a sustainable Society and to the next generation of co-operators.

We welcomed the return of Elaine Dean and Richard Bickle, who were once again elected to the Board and as our President and Vice President, respectively. Bob Burlton and Maryann Denfhy joined our Board and Bradley Tuckfield was re-elected. We welcomed Selina Butterfield-Mashoofi, Chief Financial Officer & ICAEW Fellow. Selina plays a pivotal role in helping to drive forward the financial sustainability of the Society.

### **The External Context**

The latest inflation figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) show inflation (CPI) of 6.8% in July 2023 and food and non-alcoholic beverage price inflation remains high at 14.9%. On 3 August 2023, the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) raised interest rates for the 14th meeting in a row. Rates were increased by 0.25 percentage points to 5.25%, the highest they have been since April 2008. Continuing levels of high inflation adversely affects the cost-of-living crisis, hitting consumer pockets particularly with increased food and mortgage costs, dampening hopes of short-term recovery, and resulting in a reduced spending capacity. This has contributed to large-scale Industrial action having taken place across several sectors including junior doctors, consultants, nurses, civil servants, Ofgem workers, driving test examiners, passport office





**£20.8m**

CASH  
GENERATION

**£532.1m**

GROSS SALES IN  
THE FIRST HALF OF  
THE YEAR

**£1.9m**

IN DIVIDENDS TO  
OUR MEMBERS,  
COLLEAGUES,  
COMMUNITIES

staff, environment agency workers, railway workers and airport workers.

The pace of price rises remains faster in the UK than throughout the eurozone, as the impacts of Brexit are realised both politically and economically. The freedom to make trade deals has made no difference so far but the UK has sadly witnessed an expanded market for the illegal exploitation of people who are being trafficked in to fill the gaps in labour, with the shocking statistic of over 21,000 people crossing the channel in small boats so far this year. The ongoing invasion of Ukraine continues to impact energy prices, and inflation across the globe.

Risk management is high on business agendas across the UK, the latest controversies at the BBC, McDonalds, NatWest, Credit Suisse, and the travesty at Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, means that hard lessons must be learned, and appropriate mitigations and future-proofing measures put in place.

### **Delivering Our Purpose**

As a business, we continue to further deliver on our purpose of creating a sustainable Society for all – and the financial, environmental, and human sustainability needed to do this successfully.

Learning from new trends and revising our strategy and operations is key to

driving down the cost of goods and the cost to serve for the benefit of all. To help our colleagues meet the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis, we significantly invested in frontline colleagues' wellbeing and livelihood, with increased rates of pay, setting our minimum pay rate to £10.75 per hour. We also launched our Difference Maker hub, a reward, recognition, and engagement platform.

### **Retail Crime**

As the retail sector has seen violence and abuse of retail workers almost double since pre-pandemic levels, we have worked co-operatively with our Board and actively responded to the concerns of our colleagues with significant investment of £750,000 to improve loss prevention and safety measures, such as new colleague headsets, body-worn cameras, as well as increased store security guards and store detective presence. We remain passionate and prioritise our efforts to protect our colleagues, Members, and customers, and continue to raise awareness of violence and aggression of our retail workers through local media coverage, local constabularies, Police & Crime Commissioners and Members of Parliament. I have personally written to 22 MP's this year following incidents towards our colleagues, and welcomed Alex Norris MP, who is leading a

# A Message from our Chief Executive continued

new Parliamentary Bill for the better protection for shop workers from abuse while doing their jobs, to meet and talk to colleagues in our Hickings Lane store to discuss anti-social behaviour and colleague safety.

## **Our Business Performance**

The Society has continued to innovate at pace to meet the rising challenges of achieving budget and delivering a positive performance in the first half of the year.

Gross sales remained strong, delivering £532.1m, an increase of £21.2m (+4.1%) from August 2022, despite inflationary increases and pressure on volume. Our trading profit delivered £7.6m, a slight reduction of £0.3m (-3.8%) in the same period last year. We enjoyed a period of seasonally warm weather in June, making a huge difference to our trading performance for period 4–5, increasing sales by £3.1m (+5.5%). July, however, was the sixth wettest on Met Office record and this unseasonably wet and windy weather significantly impacted our trading performance on food. The death rate has also been notably lower than in recent years, showing a 4% decrease year-on-year.

## **Investing for the Future**

Following our commitment in investing in our estate, since the start of 2023 we have launched three new local stores, regenerated 20 community stores and two funeral homes bringing a modern, fresh look into the communities that we serve. In total, we are committed to investing £39m in our growth plans for 2023.

We continue to receive interest in several of our trading sites and have taken the strategic but difficult decision to sell a number of stores to Tesco Stores Limited (Tesco) for completion in the coming months. Our colleagues' roles are protected through the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE). All colleagues have been offered the opportunity to transfer to Tesco, and vacancies in the local area for any colleagues that would like to stay with us, will be held. Our priority will be supporting colleagues through a smooth transition. We wish to thank our colleagues for their loyalty and dedication to our business and their community over the years. This strategic decision was made following careful and serious consideration of the level of investment and the return on our investments so that we continue to improve our offer to Members and customers and deliver sustainable growth.

The project to join the Co-operative LIDIA network continues, and we are on track to move over from Spring 2024.

Technology and innovation are key to maximising our commercial performance. Our self-scan checkouts are now available in 159 stores, offering a quicker payment option. Partnerships with Just Eat, Deliveroo and Uber Eats continue to grow, driving incremental sales for the Society, while offering our Members and customers alternative ways to shop with us.



### **Our Members and customers**

On our journey to green energy self-sufficiency, solar panels have been rolled-out to 64 stores, generating an average 30% of electricity required for those stores and represents approximately 6.5% of our total consumption.

In Funeral, we also made steady progress in our green journey, following the significant investment made in this area to reduce energy consumption, working towards our vision for a fully electric fleet.

Our commercial strategy was focused on our Members, with a significant investment of £2m in prices for our key value lines and introducing a wide range of Member prices. Our Member pricing promotions continue to drive Membership participation in our stores, as we head towards our stretch target participation of 30%.

Following the establishment of our Funeral Plans business, we launched our FCA-approved Funeral Transactional Website in February, offering the sale of funeral plans online – a first for the Society – venturing into the e-commerce market. We have partnered with Co-op Legal Services to offer our Members, customers and funeral clients' expert advice on wills, probate, and lasting powers of attorney.

### **Working together with purpose and creating a sustainable Society for all**

Our Purpose, creating a sustainable Society for all, flows throughout our strategy and informs our decision making.

At the annual Co-op Congress event in June, we hosted a workshop on our Malawi Partnership, which is developing into an International Co-operative Development. I am delighted that after sharing our insight and knowledge, the Malawi range is



## A Message from our Chief Executive continued



now being stocked by MidCounties, Lincolnshire, Scotmid and Radstock Co-operative Societies.

Our partnership with Pennies, the leading UK charity working to protect and grow micro-donations, allowing Members and customers using card machines at tills across all our retail sites to donate to Dementia UK continues to succeed. Since the launch, we have raised an incredible £71,000.

In April, Leader of the Labour Party, The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer, visited our community store in Ripley, and Deputy Leader The Rt Hon Angela Rayner visited our store in Littleover. They were excellent in engaging with our colleagues and were interested in our active community work and the insights provided from our Society. We were able to share some key messages on making work pay for our colleagues, meaningful Membership, young people, green energy self-sufficiency and international development through our Malawi Partnership.

Helping young people thrive in our Society is central to our long-term sustainability, relevance, and success. This year, our Debt-free Degrees campaign

went live in June for our Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship programme in conjunction with Arden University. We made a pledge to offer 300 work experience placements, offer 1,500 young people employability support as part of our Adopt a School programme and opportunities were also offered to 11 young people to join the Society as Funeral Service Assistant Apprentices.

In addition to thanking and rewarding all our colleagues with colleague dividends in June, we continue to showcase and reward our Difference Makers, every month with individual and team awards. We encourage and celebrate Difference Makers across the Society for the meaningful value they bring, bringing about a step change for inclusion and diversity in the workplace and in celebration of the excellent results they have achieved. Sarah Dickens, Naomi Smith, Samantha Thompson, and Kiran Bhogal have been highlighted in the Women to Watch & Role Models for Inclusion in Retail produced by Diversity in Retail in partnership with The MBS Group.

We are committed to inclusive leadership teams and have invested in

diverse talent programmes including Global Women Leaders, Ethnic Senior Leaders, and Ethnic Future Leaders. These unique, comprehensive, cross-industry programmes are designed to provide a series of experiences and learning opportunities to support career progression, run by Diversity in Hospitality, Travel & Leisure (WiHTL), who are dedicated to creating diverse and inclusive environments.

### **Our sustainable future**

In July, the Board reaffirmed its strategic priorities of Membership, Green Energy self-sufficiency and young people. Incentives have been aligned to meet these priorities for the sustainable future success of the Society. As part of the Board Strategy day, we had external presenters, Softcat sharing opportunities in the Artificial Intelligence arena. We also discussed with the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) the retail and shopper trends for 2023, to help broaden our perspective and inform our future decision making. Following qualitative Member research and engagement with our Board and the Membership, Community, and Strategy Committee, we have now launched the quantitative phase. This starts our new journey in embracing democracy in our decision making throughout the society.

We have started a strategic venture with external consultants Outram Cullinan & Co (OC&C), working closely with the Executive and Leadership cohort to look at how we realise our full potential in Food and Funeral; look at complementary services that make a difference for the Members, customers,

and communities that we serve; and how we can make better use of our assets.

As we look ahead to the second half of the financial year, we will continue to demonstrate innovation, resilience, and tenacity to overcome the demanding times ahead. We are actively looking at how new technology and innovation may impact the wider society and our business, including Artificial Intelligence, developments in new social media platform Threads, and the rapid growth of the weight-loss drug market, supported through the NHS. Meeting our strategic priorities, listening to our Members, and investing in the future, we will continue to mitigate increasing costs, deliver initiatives and campaigns that offer our Members and customers great value for money whilst providing choice of how, when and where Members and customers shop with us. We will continue to place our Members and customers at the heart of everything we do and delivering our Purpose of creating a sustainable Society for all.



**Debbie Robinson**  
Chief Executive

# Membership and Community Update



Our Members and the communities we serve are central to the success of our Society. By continuing to shop with us, we're able to reinvest into our trading estate, provide Member rewards, support Member groups and activities, as well as fund local good causes and community projects through our Community Dividend Fund.

Our approach to supporting our Members and communities is underpinned by the five key strategic themes below.

### Pathways to Member participation

Our Member and Community Relations Officers (MCROs) and Membership and Community Councils (MCCs) support all new store openings, helping to put Membership on the map in the new communities we serve.

Members and colleagues from across the Society teamed up to celebrate inclusion at PRIDE events across our trading regions Birmingham, Peterborough, Chesterfield, Lichfield, Belper, Corby and Leicester. Attending these events is a great opportunity to show our solidarity with LGBTQ+ communities.

As we regenerate our trading estate, we've introduced community spaces where we're able to do so. These spaces offer groups a comfortable space to use for a range of activities, including a Murder Mystery event! This unique event took place at the recently opened Insomnia Café in Blaby, and the Whetstone Theatre Group, who receives a grant from the MCC, delivered the production of 'Oliver with a Twist'.

It was a sell-out event and we look forward to holding future events at the Café showcasing the talents of Members in our community.

During Co-ops Fortnight we offered our Members free entry into the Aston Manor Road Transport Museum, where we have historical vehicles from the region on show.

At the opening of our Streethay Store we held a free bike maintenance event for Members and customers to have their bike checked and take advantage of free minor repairs at the same time.

Halesworth store recently underwent a major regeneration, to honour the career and community service of café owner, Maureen, the community room was named after her. The community room is free for all to use. The venue is already being used regularly by a new community group launched with Communities Together.

### Health and wellbeing

Although firstly intended for Schools, our **Healthy Choices** Workshops have proved popular with adults groups too and have been delivered to groups meeting at Shuttlewood Clarke in Markfield, the Al-khair Charity and Abbotts Road United Reformed Church in Leicester, and a Mums and Tots Group at The Hub in Kettering. We held over 20 Healthy Choices sessions at local Holiday and Food (HAF) events in the Western region. The events are designed to ensure local young people get to have activity with food during half term, Easter and Summer holidays.



# Membership and Community Update continued

Loddon Library host a monthly wellbeing event 'Time out Thursdays', which we support each month with a different theme. So far this year we've covered Healthy Choices, Fairtrade, Dementia Friends Training, Scam awareness and a visit to the community gym as well as providing light refreshments at each session.

Two Health Days have been held this year so far, at Saint Neots and St. Ives in partnership with Wood Green Pet Charity, Fitness Rush and Bruces Bikes. The events were well supported by colleagues, raising over £400 for charity.

Mental health and wellbeing remains a key focus for the Society, for colleagues and our communities. We held a 'Time to Talk' day at Insomnia Café in Blaby and supported with refreshments for adults living with Parkinson's Disease during a canal boat outing in Loughborough. We supported the Singing for Dementia Café in Kettering and provided refreshments for an elderly games group in Narborough library, close to our store.

## ***Dying Matters Awareness Week 8–14 May***

An annual event focused on communities coming together to talk about death, dying and grief. We hosted three coffee afternoons at our Funeral Homes in, Hunstanton, Whittlesey and Saint Neots. As well as hosting events at Desborough Library and at our Market Harborough Store.

## **Education, culture and recreation**

Our educational workshops continue to be delivered in schools. These are around **Healthy Choices, Fairtrade** and **Savvy Shopping** with the latter proving to be very popular with students from St. Martin's Special School in Alvaston, Derby. Our new employability and **Mind your Money** game has been well received in senior schools and educational establishments. The Ripley Academy in particular enjoyed their workshop as they visited their local Ripley store, along with students from St. John's School where they met Sir Keir Starmer, who was visiting our store to discuss the cost-of-living crisis.



The students were so excited as they got to let him know about the work they were doing and what they had learned in the workshop.

Western MCC spent three days at Veritas Primary Academy delivering varied Healthy Choices Workshops with all children from Nursery to Year 6. Fruit tasting sessions were held with Nursery and reception children, Healthy Choices Workshops with fruit kebab making were held with Years 1–4. With Savvy Shopping Lunchbox sessions held with Year 5–6 children.

Members groups in Birmingham continue to offer activities for Members in Dance, Table Tennis, Gardening and History, while our Musical Theatre Member Group are preparing for their winter panto 'Jack and the Beanstalk'.

### ***Celebrating co-operative heritage***

Remembering those who came before us, their achievements and their work that shaped the co-operative movement is an important part of our work.

We're involved in a number of history events and have supported the Alfreton History's Anniversary. Work is underway on a History Trail in Ripley as well as on Emmanuel Merchant's grave in Duffield.

Traditions were upheld as we celebrated Members of the former Derby Co-op at the Senior Members' Gathering who have served over 50 years. The event was attended by over 100 guests, who all enjoyed a cream tea and entertainment, which included a memorabilia showcase. We loved hearing everyone's memories and stories!

We supported new colleagues joining the Society from Shaw in Oldham, Armthorpe and Barnby Dun from Doncaster, heading off to the Rochdale Pioneers' Museum. Visiting the Museum is a great opportunity to learn about the history of the movement.

A new shopping bag for life was launched to support the Co-operative Heritage Trust, in Rochdale, these are for sale in our stores and a proportion of the sale goes to the Trust to keep co-operative history alive.

### ***Learning new skills***

Our Member groups continue to provide opportunities for Members to get involved and learn something new. From Art classes and Friendship Groups in Chesterfield, Dance in Eastwood, Tai Chi near Stapleford, Craft, Friendship Groups, Tatting, and the new Men's Group in Derby.

A lively new group formed in the Northern region, following the popularity of an Inclusivity Event, 'I'm Me', held in the Insomnia Café in Derby with Des Coleman and many local people showcasing their talents.

We attended and funded an educational programme in partnership with Kids Country across Peterborough. The programme involves potato planting, a bee day, apple day and breakfast week. Educating children about what it takes to go from farm to fork.

Support was provided to **Cook It, Eat it** – a sustainable workshop in Peterborough, making sweet and savoury Yorkshire puddings, salads and ramen noodles in partnership with Flourish Peterborough.

# Membership and Community Update continued

We held a community day at our Sustainable Space in Yaxley with Partners Woodgreen and Project Abundance. Woodgreen were offering free pet health checks and interactive pet toy making. Project Abundance were making pinecone bird feeders that families in attendance could take home.

## Fair and sustainable communities

In Yorkshire, we worked with fairandfunky, to deliver workshops in schools around climate change and scrap around plastic. We attended World Environmental Day and Eco School Conference in Wooldale. Workshops were also delivered at New Mill School and Shepley Schools, as well as supporting their after-school craft activities.

Following our successful Inclusivity Event, this has enabled greater relationships with Upbeat in Derby. We're exploring a partnership to support refugees.

We were delighted to deliver a number of bike events once again including one at Heatherton, which was in association with the local community police and local authority. Our popular bike events in Birmingham and Lichfield have continued to take place in the Western region offering Members and the community a chance to have their bike checked over and minor repairs take place.

Burton were delighted to see the return of our Fairtrade Tea-Dance for the first time since the pandemic, which was attended by over 80 Members, all coming together to celebrate Fairtrade.

Principle 6 was in action during Co-op Fortnight as we worked with the Peterborough Wombles and Co-op Pioneers to keep the community tide, collecting 25 bags of litter during a two-hour litter pick.

Volunteering is a key focus for us, with MCC Members, retail and funeral colleagues supporting volunteering days at Desborough United Reform Church, Saving Saffron Brook and Holiday and Fun activities at St Matthews Big Local, New Parks community hub and Coalville and Neighbours.

Our **Fairtrade** workshops continue to prove popular in schools and with community groups. This year we've expanded our reach and have presented in mosques and gurdwaras, Warm Spaces and Hubs.

## Young people

Supporting and engaging young people continues to be a focus for us in 2023 and beyond. We continue to offer assemblies and workshops to schools and youth groups, but we're also delivering intergenerational events, work experience and employability skills.

We supported both the Community Games and National Playday in Burton this year, with healthy snacks, fun games, and information on what we do for young people in the community where we trade. Over 4,000 people attended these events, and our Giant Eatwell Guide puzzle and Snakes and Ladders games continued to prove popular.

Earlier this year, in partnership with Sally Connick's 'Get Suffolk Reading' campaign, we hosted and funded

a book battle between the author, residents from a local care home and children from Pakefield Primary. The event was well received and written about in three local papers with a combined readership of 6 million!

Working with Loddon Library, we delivered 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' story as well as a family picnic featuring all the foods the caterpillar ate.

Working with Leicestershire Education Business Company, we held mock interviews for students choosing their GCSE options at Market Bosworth High School.

We proudly supported on the judging panel and the celebration event for Sustainable Schools, Leicester, for schools who have exceeded in making a difference to protect climate change, waste and litter, or to encourage healthier lifestyles in their schools and communities.

Retail, Funeral and Floral worked together to deliver a presentation on Central Co-op careers for students attending Robert Smyth Academy in

Market Harborough. We also delivered anti bullying, co-op values and healthy living sessions to 180 children attending Priors Hall School in Corby.

This year, we launched our Digital Masterclass, with the help of Whetstone Theatre Group and in collaboration with Mid Counties Co-op and Heart of England Co-op Societies, we have launched a Co-op microsite.

### **Community Dividend Fund**

Over the last 12 months, we have awarded £180,719 in Community Dividend Fund grants to 162 local groups and good causes. Groups can apply for funds ranging from £100 to £5,000 to support projects that aim to support access to food, health and wellbeing, inclusion and the environment.

### **Making a co-operative difference in Malawi – co-operation between co-operatives**

Last, but far from least, our partnership work in Malawi has been making positive progress this year and we are excited to share a report on the progress to date and Jane Avery's visit to Malawi:





# Membership and Community Update continued



In April 2023, I was honoured to represent the Society, in Malawi, to review how our Members' money is being spent to support co-operatives in Malawi. It was my first visit to central Africa. I received a warm welcome and it became clear that people in Malawi are ambitious to grow their economy and maintain their independence. It was also clear that co-operation is seen as a business model and model for a fair and just Society. The Malawi Vision is that by 2063 the country will be an inclusively wealthy and self-reliant nation. The words inclusive and self-reliant chime well with Co-operative Values and Principles.

I was able to meet with Government ministers and it was interesting to note that, as in this country, politicians of all political persuasions agree that the Co-operative model helps to meet their goals, but they don't always join the dots and give practical support to grass roots organisations like MAFECO who are achieving great improvements through education, training and marketing opportunities for the Co-operatives they work with. I was very

pleased to see that the funding that Central Co-op is giving to MAFECO is therefore playing a very important role in enabling Co-operative development and support to continue in Malawi.

It is important to stress that this is a partnership and there are benefits for both parties. Members in the UK can buy more products from Malawi and this is a developing initiative for us. The quality of the products is not in doubt, but some of the lines are more popular than others and this may be down to pricing and choice. Rice for example is plentiful and available from other countries and very cheaply. Nevertheless, it is important to give our Members choice and information about the provenance of the food they are buying. The surplus we generate from the sale of products from Malawi used to continue our support for MAFECO.

It is my hope that other Co-operatives in the UK will join this initiative. With our help Malawi can transform from being the fifth poorest country in Africa, into one of shared prosperity and self-reliance.

## **Board of Directors**

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Richard Bickle – Vice President

Jane Avery

Suzanne Bennett

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Bob Burlton

John Chillcott

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## **Executive Team**

Debbie Robinson - Chief Executive

Selina Butterfield-Mashoofi – Chief Financial Officer

Paul Dennis – Chief Operations Officer

Sarah Dickins – Chief Member, Customer & People Officer

Andy Peake – Chief Commercial Officer

## **Society Secretary**

Andrew Seddon



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