

Central England Co-operative

2022 Interim Members' Meeting

Thank you to everyone who took part in our Interim Members' Meeting in October 2022.

As part of the event, we asked Members to submit questions before and during the meeting. We received a number of questions and comments on a wide range of topics.

We have put together an overview of the main themes on which Members asked questions, which can be viewed below.

What is the Society doing to improve colleague pay?

We're guaranteeing a minimum of £10 per hour for our colleagues. Effective from 30 October 2022. This is in addition to continuing to provide paid breaks.

The Society is committed to improving the pay rates of the Society's customer facing colleagues, subject to important affordability considerations and the management of internal pay comparisons. The Society continues to pay above the National Living Wage (NLW) and does not reduce rates for those colleagues under 25 years old.

We will also be providing all our colleagues with a £50 on their membership cards in the coming months to support them with the cost of the festive period and provide a range of colleague benefits and wellbeing support.

What is the reason for decided to rebrand to Central Coop?

Our new brand and name Central Co-op reflect our modern offer, does not have any geographical boundaries, and reflects our central role to communities and the Co-operative movement, adopting the internationally recognised ICA logo. We are rebranding in a financially and environmentally sustainable way and will take a measured approach to rolling this out across our assets and estate.

With potential power cuts bring mentioned over the winter, does the Society have plans to respond to this?

We are looking at what black outs could mean for the Society along with how we continue to minimise our usage. Sources at this stage indicate food and funeral businesses will be classed as essential users so should be protected.

Why has the Society decided to move to a new support centre?

Earlier this year an exciting property opportunity presented itself when we received an offer to purchase our current support centre and an office block in the centre of Lichfield became available, the former Police Mutuals Offices. This move maintains our commitment to Lichfield whilst providing us with a new modern space we can design to meet the needs of our colleagues, and also provides us with rental opportunities at the new site.

What is the Society doing to support global communities impacted by climate change, conflict, and the energy crisis?

We have launched our new Co-operative International Trading Development Fund to move communities out of poverty through trade rather than aid, with our first project based in Malawi. We now sell Malawi-linked products and the surplus from these sales goes to raise the funds required to meet our five-year commitment to the development fund. We are inviting other UK co-operative societies to engage and support this new initiative so that the positive impacts through trade and support can be expanded.

We are complementing our Fairtrade agenda with a distinctly co-operative approach to international trade development through this leadership initiative. Our Society has engaged with the Co-operative College with their experience and strong links into the Malawi Federation of Co-operatives (MAFECO).

It's devastating to see the continued conflict in Ukraine, and our thoughts are with all those affected. We've made two of our residential properties available for Ukrainian refugees through the Homes for Ukraine scheme and identified families for both homes. We are supporting with visa applications, council tax and utility costs, furnishings, and employment. It's a real privilege to be able to welcome these families into our co-operative community.

We've continued to halt the sale of Russian products in our stores and have raised almost £28,000 in donations for the Disasters Emergency Committee Ukraine Humanitarian appeal.

Recent floods in Pakistan are having a devastating impact, submerging vast areas of land, and leaving millions of people in need of urgent help. We are contributing towards the DEC fund for Pakistan to provide help and support to those who desperately need it.

Will the Society be opening more stores in new trading areas?

We opened six new stores in the first half of the year, including Wolverhampton, our first store located in a train station. We continue to develop a pipeline of new store sites to continue to build and strengthen our trading estate and have identified opportunities in new trading areas including those sites shared in our Annual Report and Accounts 2021/22 in Lancashire, North Yorkshire, and Merseyside.

Why are you introducing self-checkout tills, and will you be removing customer facing colleagues?

Self-checkout has now been installed in 110 stores, and this is proving to be popular with Members and customers. A further roll-out is due for completion in October. We will continue to have customer facing colleagues in store to support Members and customers, and the purpose providing self-service options is to support choice and convenience.

What is the Society doing to tackle the problem of food waste?

We are privileged to support the development of Kandoroo, a cooperative development funding initiative, working with care professionals to distribute electronic vouchers through an app or card, for eligible clients to use within participating stores. This initiative closely aligns to our Membership strategy for Fair & Sustainable Communities, as well as, UN Sustainable Development Goals. The e-vouchers provide a dignified route to access food for those in poverty from care professionals.

Over 100,000 Magic Bags have been created via our Too Good To Go scheme, which equates to a saving of c.250,000 tonnes of CO₂e emissions. This successful, dynamic solution has positively impacted our environmental sustainability by significantly reducing surplus waste, in addition to offering sustainable access to food. We highlighted the partnership and the issue of food waste in WRAP's (Waste and Resources Action Programme) Food Waste Action Week with a giant installation portraying the three most wasted food items in the UK at our Boley Park store in Lichfield, to spotlight solutions to food wastage.

Also in partnership with WRAP, we presented our food redistribution programme to their animal feed workgroup in April, to raise awareness of the different ways in which animal feed can fit into a retailer's waste hierarchy.

We were pleased to take an active part in the Food & Drink Expo 2022 at the NEC in Birmingham along with FareShare Midlands and Too Good To Go, to highlight and talk about 'surplus with purpose' with a particular focus on food waste.

Why does the Society have Independent Non-Executive Directors and how long do they serve on the Board?

In accordance with the Society's Rules, the normal period of office for elected Directors is three years which expires at the conclusion of the final Members' meeting at the end of their three-year term. Directors cannot serve for more than nine consecutive years without a break of service of at least one year. The Board may appoint up to two Independent Non-Executive Directors, to bring additional skills, experience and expertise to the Board, whose length of appointment is determined by the Board. Independent Non-Executive Directors are remunerated on the same basis as the elected Directors. Any such appointments are subject to annual review by the Board and are submitted for ratification at a meeting of the Members of the Society.

What is the Society doing to support Members and customers through the cost-of-living crisis and in response to food price inflation?

To support our Members and customers during these difficult times, we have developed a "shop locally for less" campaign focused on offering great value for money across all of our product ranges. We've also launched a voucher scheme with personalised offers to reward loyalty and are planning exciting opportunities to deliver more value specifically to our Members in future.

How do we see the future of the petrol filling stations following the Group selling their portfolio?

Our petrol filling stations are a profitable part of our Society, and we are not currently looking to sell the portfolio.

What is the Society looking to offer through the Membership App and on Member Offers?

The Society is looking to make it easy for Members to digitally access all aspects Membership through the App. Features will be built in stages and will include an easy sign up journey to Membership, a digital version of the membership card, access to share of the profits balance, exclusive offers and personalised communications through to participation in community activities and broader Society matters. Member offers will be running across c.50 products from 26th October on a number of key everyday essential products as an exclusive benefit to members of Central England Coop