



OCT 2024 INTERIM MEETING

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Food

- Q: It has been reported that some Co-op societies are using facial recognition software backed by AI. Is this something Central Co-op are using? If so, what safeguards are in place to protect privacy and mitigate things like racial profiling?
- A: *We do not currently use this type of technology but have plans to test and trial it in the future. Any implementation would of course take into account GDPR requirements.*
- Q: Why did we recently advertise a frozen fish and chips member deal last weekend which wasn't available in all stores?
- A: *We continue to test & learn in the members deals, we are committed to opening members deals up to all stores where it is commercially viable.*
- Q: The Co-op introduced a frozen range from Fieldfare and a number of prices are still incorrect on till screens. When will this be fixed?
- A: *We are working with the supplier to both fix the current issue & the future ways of working, the aim is to have this completed by Christmas.*
- Q: Will there be a review of self-checkouts as this has greatly impacted customer service at my local store?
- A: *Self checkouts have been rolled out to the majority of our stores and are expected as a payment method by most customers shopping grocery stores. Our kiosks remain available as a way to pay for Members and customers who prefer to be served by a member of the store team.*
- Over 40% of customers choose to shop using a self-checkout where they are available and we have seen this number grow significantly since introducing self-checkouts.*
- Q: Why doesn't the Society 'Free From' range offer a greater range of products?
- A: *A review of Free From is high on the agenda for 2025, we are working with both the buying group and additional suppliers to source the best range moving forward.*
- Q: Has the Society considered putting air fryer cooking instructions on meat and chicken packaging?
- A: *This is something that the Buying Group are looking at as part of the work that is conducted on Co-op packaging & communication.*
- Q: The Fairtrade wine has been reduced from 12.5% to 11% therefore reducing the quality of the wine but the price has stayed the same. Can the Society explain the change?

A: *We have raised this query with FRTS (Co-op buying group) so that we can provide further information on the background to this decision. When an ABV percentage is reduced, this is usually to offset a cost price increase in the supply chain.*

Q: When does the new store open at Shelton Lock?

A: *The Insomnia cafe is opening on the 19th December and the new store will open on the 20th January.*

Q: Do self-service tills lead to higher levels of theft in stores?

A: *We have no evidence to support this at present, although we do know from 'walk-offs' that self-checkouts give opportunities to those who are intent on stealing from us. We are hoping to trial camera technology to prevent theft at self-checkouts next year.*

Q: We've heard how the Society is investing in new stores and increasing colleague pay, but we also know that Retail crime is increasing which impacts colleague safety. Has the Society considered putting security guards on all stores in the evenings to increase colleague safety ?

A: *Security Guarding forms part of our colleagues safety and loss prevention plan, alongside other measures such as Watch Me Now and Body Worn Cameras. The cost of permanent security guards across all stores is prohibitive and, like all retailers, we take a multi-faceted approach to supporting our colleague safety, deploying guards to stores that report the highest level of retail crime and theft, and those stores that we rate as being at higher risk of colleague safety incidents.*

Year on year we have seen the number of incidents of violence and aggression reduce in our stores, and working alongside local police forces have managed to see a number of prolific shoplifters and perpetrators of crime be detained.

Q: How do you support colleagues who are impacted by violent crime in stores?

A: *All colleagues have access to our colleague assistance programme, and are supported by their line managers, Operations Manager and our loss prevention analysts following incidents of violence and aggression in stores.*

Q: What additional steps can the Society take to address Retail Crime?

A: *We currently have a number of measures in place to protect our colleagues including Watch Me Now, Body Worn Cameras and Guarding in our highest risk stores. Stores have access to a crime database to record all incidents of crime, violence and aggression. Next year we are hoping to trial a number of new initiatives including Facewatch, product protection (including lockable doors on spirits) and camera technology on our self-*

checkouts. We currently work closely with local police forces, sharing intelligence to enable prolific offenders to be arrested and charged, and will continue to do this to keep our colleagues safe.

Funeral

Q: Is the Society gaining or losing market share in Funerals ?

A: *Underlying market share is in line year on year. The biggest difference is in the direct/Unattended market as providers like Pure Cremations continue to disrupt in this area.*

Q: Is Funeral Safe a credit union? If not, why did the Society not look for a Co-op partner?

A: *Funeral Safe Ltd is not a credit union. As part of its procurement and partnering activity, the Society does explore credit union and other co-operative partners, but this is not a business area where there is currently a credit union or co-operative option.*

Property

Q: Do we still own the Central Hall in Derby and if so, can we have an update on any plans that we have for it.

A: *Yes, the Society still owns Central Hall. The ground floor is effectively fully let, including tenants such as Gregg, Admiral Amusements and Busy Beans cafe, but the upperparts remain vacant. The Society is exploring various alternative uses for the upper floors but no firm plans have yet been agreed.*

Q: What is the Co-ops policy towards working with communities to retain local sites for community use?

A: *The Society already works with a number of local and community organisations in respect of its property portfolio, for example the Ikhlas Education centre in Derby, the Wooldale Allotment Association in Wooldale and Chelmund's Community Enterprises CIC in Chelmesley Wood. The Society would welcome the opportunity to work with more local community groups and associations and would encourage any interested parties to make contact to discuss any specific locations.*

Q: How many stores are kitted out with solar panels to further improve your green credentials?

A: *We have installed solar pv facilities on 116 existing trading stores and aim to install solar panels on all new build stores where it is possible to do so.*

Q: When will you start building the new Co-op in the village of Great Glen?

A: A planning application has been submitted for a revised store design and a decision is awaited. Subject to the grant of planning permission, the Society hopes to be in a position to commence construction during the first half of 2025, with the store opening towards the end of the year

Colleague

Q: Is the Society still committed to offering training programmes to older staff members ?

A: *Yes, although we have been highlighting school and degree roles for students - our apprenticeships and in house training is available for all and we have a variety of age ranges completing programmes.*

Q: How does the Society decide the apprenticeship levels that are offered to colleagues?

A: *Apprenticeship training is embedded within our career pathways for roles, the appropriate level is assessed and the training sourced to support colleagues learning on the job. We start at level 2 for entry level roles, level 3 and 4 for management training and offer up to level 6 and 7 depending on the requirement within our workforce plan.*

Q: What are Society Difference makers? What methods do you have in place to listen to colleagues at store level?

A: *Our colleagues told us as part of our culture work in 2022 the one thing they value most whilst working for Central Coop is being able to 'make a difference'. We have used this phrase to bring our culture alive and recognise those colleagues who go out of their way and really make a difference to their communities in which they serve.*

We have 2 anonymous full colleague surveys every year for colleagues to share their views, we have a colleague voice forum for Store teams along with Support Centre and Funeral forum for listening regularly on how we can support and improve working in the Society. We have regular feedback sessions with colleagues and have a space on the Society intranet for colleagues to post questions and thoughts.

Q: Is there currently a freeze on colleague recruitment in stores?

A: *As we seek to keep our costs in line with sales, we carefully consider the number of colleague hours required in each store and recruit accordingly. Over the last few years we have seen innovations such as electronic self-edge labelling and self-checkouts which mean we require fewer colleague hours in stores than in previous years.*

Q: Are there any plans to increase the hourly rate of team leaders?

A: *Central Co-op hold pay negotiation each year with its recognised trade union, USDAW. These negotiations determine the pay rates that will be paid to our colleagues.*

Membership

Q: Can the Society provide an update on the Co-op Generation card which was launched in March?

A: *Co-op Generation was launched as a pilot to understand the appetite of younger people to benefit from Society offers. The learnings from this pilot are informing wider work to build a new Society member proposition.*

- Q: Why can colleagues not use staff discount cards in all Co-op stores?
- A: *Each Co-op business operates independently. This means they have developed individual membership and discount solutions.*
- Q: My Co-op credit card earns me points that are converted vouchers which can be spent my local store. Will this continue if Co-op Bank is sold?
- A: *The Society is currently reviewing its affinity arrangements and we will update members on any changes to arrangements at our next meeting. Separately, if Co-op Bank is sold, it is possible that the new owners may wish to review existing partnership agreements.*
- Q: Would the Co-op be willing to support more prides e.g. Burton pride 2025?
- A: *Each Membership and Community Council decides on its support for local events including Pride activity in its local area and they will review local Pride activity as part of their 2025 planning process. We will ensure that this suggestion is shared with the relevant MCC.*
- Q: How do we promote member groups to all members?
- A: *Our members' group information is published on our Society website.*
- membership.centralengland.coop/membership/events

Sustainability

- Q: Will solar panels be installed at the Mulbarton store in Norwich?
- A: *Solar panel installation for this store is planned for 2025, subject to contractor and landlord agreement*
- Q: How much do we pay Olio for their services?
- A: *We are confident that our relationship with Olio provides value for money to the Society. We are not able to share supplier commercial terms.*
- Q: Does the Co-op have a bicycle recycling scheme?
- A: *No. The Society signposts customers and members to local schemes.*
- Q: Do we have/expect to have electric vehicle charging points? If so, will they be Co-op branded or from 3rd party/dedicated companies?
- A: *The Society has EV Charging installed at circa ten sites (including a new rapid charger at the new Support Centre for colleagues) however there is a programme to roll out Rapid EV charging points at more sites where appropriate from 2025 onwards. These will be installed and managed by a third-party CPO (charge point operator).*
- Q: How many Society stores have solar panels installed?
- A: *116 installations have now been completed, with 30 more planned this year, and 29 planned for 2025.*

Q: What plans are there to better support food banks as they seem to be missing out now that we use Olio to shift surplus food?

A: *Olio is supported by 100,000 volunteers in the UK and Ireland meaning this is a cost effective, community centred, accessible solution to reducing food waste and feeding people. Olio is free to use and open to any community member as a volunteer or service user, including those representing foodbanks or using foodbanks. We also continue to maintain our permanent foodbank collection points in store.*

Q: The Society has been increasing the amount of stores with solar panels, are we any closer to providing our surplus energy to our Members' and local Communities yet?

A: *We have solar energy generating facilities installed at 116 sites and it is providing around 30% of the energy needed of each site. Our energy reduction programme is helping to close the gap and we continue to pursue other technologies and sites to boost generation.*

Q: Is Olio as successful as we had hoped it would be in terms of managing Food waste in stores?

A: *Where Olio works best with good volunteer support and strong user groups, waste is reduced to items not fit for human consumption or age restricted items.*

Q: Notwithstanding the difficulties we and the local foodbanks experienced operating with Fareshare, now the arrangement is over what plans are there to better support foodbanks as they seem to be missing out now that we use Olio to shift surplus food?

A: *Olio is powered by an army of over 100,000 volunteers in the UK and Ireland meaning this is a cost effective, community centred, accessible solution to reducing food waste and feeding people. Olio is free to use and open to any community member as a volunteer or service user, including those representing foodbanks or using foodbanks. We also continue to maintain our permanent foodbank collection points in store.*

Other

Q: Does the Society have any plans to review its governance and current appointment of an independent Non-Executive Director?

A: *The Board reviews its composition annually as part of its effectiveness review. It retains the option to appoint another independent Non-Executive Director if it identifies a specific skills / experience gap.*