

2024



Central **Co-op**

Interim Report 2024

Our Family of Businesses



252
FOOD
STORES



18
PETROL
STATIONS



7
INSOMNIA
COFFEE
SHOPS



9
FLORISTS



175
FUNERAL
HOMES



1
CREMATORIUM



MANUFACTURE
OF MASONRY
AND
COFFINS



INVESTMENT
PROPERTIES
520

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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 are guided by the internationally recognised Co-operative values:

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



OUR PROUD HERITAGE DATES BACK

180

YEARS



WE EMPLOY OVER

7,500

PEOPLE



OUR MEMBERS AND CUSTOMERS ARE AT THE HEART OF OUR BUSINESS

WE'VE INSTALLED SOLAR PANELS ON

114

STORES AS PART OF OUR JOURNEY TOWARDS GREEN ENERGY SELF-SUFFICIENCY.



WE TRADE IN OVER

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

Membership



Interim Financial Highlights



Underlying turnover from continuing operations*

£497.5m

(August 2023: £511.9m)



Underlying trading profit from continuing operations*

£4.3m

(August 2023: £6.5m)



Gross sales

£486.1m

(August 2023: £532.1m)



Net Debt

£-26.3m

(August 2023: £-20.5m)



*Our Distribution Centre closed in January 2024 and delivered £30.4m Sales and £1.3m contribution in H1 FY24. Our underlying turnover and trading profit is presented as from continuing operations and therefore excluding the distribution centre.

Interim Financial Highlights continued

Capital expenditure

£11.0m

(August 2023: £17.6m)



Net assets

£270.7m

(August 2023: £273.1m)



Cash generation

£17.8m

(August 2023: £20.8m)



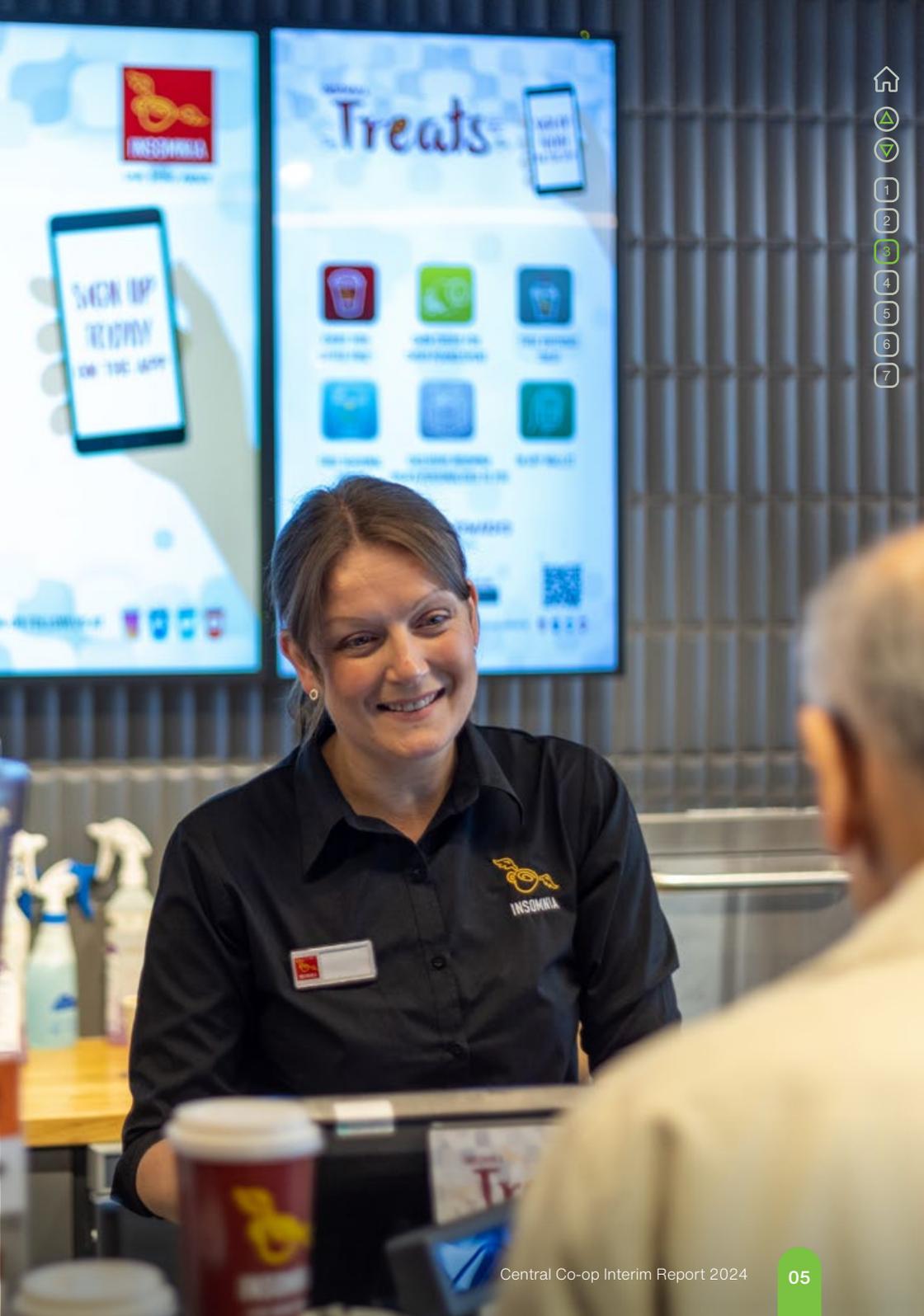
£391.7M

(AUG 23: £394.6M)
FOOD TURNOVER
(EXCLUDING VAT)



£1.5M

PAYMENTS TO AND
ON BEHALF OF
STAKEHOLDERS
(AUG 23: £1.9M)



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President's Overview

I am pleased to share an update on behalf of the Board on our co-operative activities at the half year.

As always, it's been a very busy time for our Society and Debbie will provide an update on the operational and business highlights in her report.

Dear Members,

A personal highlight for me during this period was our Senior Members' Gathering that took place in Derby during May. The event was founded by Emmanuel Merchant JP, philanthropic General Manager of the former Derby Society. The event is for long-standing members in the Derby area who have attained 50 years membership and are entitled to attend a 'sumptuous repast and concert'.

The event was well attended and much enjoyed and supported by Board and management colleagues with 1960s music from Rocks'n'Frocks for entertainment.

Our guest speakers were then Derby South MP Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett (now Baroness Beckett of Old Normanton) and then Derby City Council leader Baggy Shanker, who is now MP for Derby South.

In early February we held the Subscribing Societies meeting at our Lichfield Support Centre. This is a bi-annual meeting of all the Co-ops who subscribe to the Co-operative Party. It is attended by Presidents, Secretaries and Vice Presidents along with the General Secretary of the Co-operative Party and is a great opportunity to discuss what campaigns we want to pursue and how we can work more closely with each other.

Societies host it in rotation, and we were able to organise a dinner the night before, offer visits to some of our stores and provide delegates with a tour of the recently opened Support Centre.



“My main focus has again been on raising awareness of the violence and abuse experienced by our colleagues.”

Elaine Dean, Society President



Retail Crime

My main focus in the last six months has again been on raising awareness of the effect on our colleagues of violence and abuse of retail workers and drawing this to the attention of those who make the laws.

Because it was election year for Police and Crime Commissioners and Regional Mayors as well as local councillors we focussed on people applying for

those positions along with prospective parliamentary candidates. Assisted by some of my Board colleagues we hosted 25 visits to 37 stores and 2 funeral homes in the first half of this year, 36 visits to 64 stores in total. All visits were accompanied by a selection of colleagues from Executives, Group managers, Retail Support team, Operations managers and members of the Loss Prevention Team.

- ✓ **Rt. Hon. Yvette Cooper**, Home Secretary and MP for Pontefract, Castleford and Knottingley.
- ✓ **Alex Norris**, Former shadow Police Minister now Communities Minister and MP for Nottingham North
- ✓ **Nicolle Ndiweni-Roberts**, Derbyshire Police and Crime Commissioner
- ✓ **Gary Godden**, Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner
- ✓ **Rupert Matthews**, Leicestershire Police & Crime Commissioner
- ✓ **Sarah Parker**, Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner
- ✓ **Claire Ward**, newly elected East Midlands Regional Mayor
- ✓ **Richard Parker**, newly elected West Midlands Regional Mayor
- ✓ **Baggy Shanker**, Labour & Co-operative MP for Derby South
- ✓ **Catherine Atkinson**, MP for Derby North
- ✓ **Toby Perkins**, MP for Chesterfield
- ✓ **Andrew Pakes**, MP for Peterborough
- ✓ **Sarah Edwards**, MP for Tamworth
- ✓ **Jacob Collier** and his predecessor **Kate Kniveton**, MP for Burton and Uttoxeter
- ✓ **Lucy Rigby**, MP for Northampton North
- ✓ **Mike Reader**, MP for Northampton South
- ✓ **Samantha Niblett**, MP for South Derbyshire
- ✓ **Alice Macdonald**, MP for Norwich North
- ✓ **Jess Asato**, MP for Lowestoft
- ✓ **Sam Carling**, MP for North West Cambridgeshire
- ✓ **Sonia Kumar**, newly elected MP for Dudley
- ✓ **Tom McNeil**, former West Midlands Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner
- ✓ **Alex Ballinger**, newly elected MP for Halesowen
- ✓ **Leigh Ingham**, newly elected MP for Stafford
- ✓ **Tom Pursglove**, former MP for Corby
- ✓ **Rory Palmer**, prospective Police and Crime Commissioner for Leicestershire

President's Overview

continued

Almost all of our visitors were elected in either May or July and includes the new Home Secretary Rt. Hon. Yvette Cooper MP who visited us twice.

We also organised many more visits from local councillors in a number of regions and some unsuccessful candidates who nevertheless gave their time.

I would like to thank everybody for their support to our Society in a busy election year, my Board colleagues who supported me to ensure almost all visits had a Director present but most of all our colleagues in these stores who spoke out fearlessly of how they felt after being threatened, abused, spat at or assaulted.

Well done to all of you because YOU made these politicians very shocked and determined to do something about it. A special thanks from me to Lee Dillow who helped to co-ordinate all of these visits on behalf of the Society.

I sincerely hope this activity does make a difference, that the law is changed and that the police actually respond. We are seeing some signs of improvement in response but we will not let up on this as colleague safety is our priority.

Society Annual Conference

The Society Conference was held in late February and unfortunately I couldn't attend as I was in hospital but I managed to arrange for Co-op Party General Secretary Joe Fortune to come along and talk about how the Party is co-ordinating activity around colleague safety in stores. This session was ably hosted by our then Vice President, Richard Bickle and feedback from colleagues at the Conference on this activity has been hugely positive.

Women's Voices Event

We continued with our annual Women's Voices event in early March and we held it this year at our Lichfield Support Centre with Stella Creasy MP for Walthamstow as guest speaker, who always worked hard for working women and mothers when she was in opposition. It was a highly successful event as always and we continue to think about how we can keep improving this event and reaching more women across the movement.





Society representation at UK Retail Conference

In March, members of the Board and Executive attended the Co-operatives UK Retail Conference where Debbie Robinson and other Executives and colleagues participated to the great credit of our Society and one of our newly promoted Operations Managers Jas Mehmi spoke brilliantly about the dangers colleagues faced in store.

Belper clock unveiling

In late March, we welcomed Spring by unveiling the specially made unique Robert Owen clock positioned on our Belper store. The opening was very well attended in a historic mill town famous for association with Richard Arkwright and Jedediah Strutt.

Society Annual Members' Meeting

On the 1st May we held our annual Members' Meetings with the broadcast meeting this time coming from our Support Centre in Lichfield with 'hub' meetings in Derby, Leicester, Chesterfield and Peterborough. All meetings had Board members present and senior management to answer as many questions from members as possible. We intend to hold smaller unofficial 'mini meetings' in the months after the formal meetings to give members in outlying areas a chance to meet us.

Euro Co-op and Congress Weekend.

We hosted a Euro Co-ops Dinner in early June with more than 20 colleagues from European Co-ops visiting our Society's stores, having dinner with us and then travelling on to Co-operative Congress in Birmingham. Central Co-op sponsored the International Supper at Congress and I welcomed delegates, former Board member Jane Avery gave an illustrated talk about her visit to Malawi to meet communities benefiting from the Society's Malawi partnership and Debbie spoke about the International Co-operative Development Fund. It is really good to see our Society on the national and indeed international stage with these events.

On 4th July we were delighted to see so many of our Labour and Co-operative candidates elected and now hope to see them progress co-operative matters through Parliament.

Toy Appeal

I'm delighted to announce that as part of the Society's annual Christmas Toy Appeal, our toy lorry will once again be out and about in November and early December, supported by myself, Board members and other colleagues. This year, the lorry is smaller so we'll be able to get to even more Food and Funeral branches!

President's Overview

continued

Central Co-op customers and members will be invited to donate new, unwrapped toys and games which the Society will then donate to local charities who ensure that as many children as possible have a toy to open on Christmas morning. More details on the toy lorry schedule will be shared with members during October.

Board Director elections

I will finish by mentioning our May elections for the Board which resulted in some significant changes and new faces. Jane Avery and Tanya Noon had both reached the end of their 9-year term and had to stand down under rule. We welcomed Valerie Watson and Becci Britland to replace them respectively and thank both Jane and Tanya – who had both held office as President or Vice President – for their service and contribution to our Board.

Jody Meakin stood down as a Colleague Director after she was promoted to a new role in the Secretariat and Amanda Gallie, a colleague from our Funerals business was elected to her one-year remaining term of office.

Vice-President Richard Bickle and REMCO Chair John Chillcott both lost their seats to returning directors Sue Rushton and Maria Lee respectively. Welcome back Maria and Sue but I must pay tribute to both Richard and John who made immense and valued contributions to the Board. I was honoured to be re-elected as President in May with Maria Lee elected as Vice President.

Thanks to all our Board members and Executive who work hard to lead our Society, and to all our colleagues without whose hard work there would be no Society – I try and get out to visit as many stores and funeral homes as possible and if I haven't seen you yet I hope to do so before very long.

And thank you to all of our valued members who trade with us – you are the reason we do what we do!



Elaine Dean
Society President

A Message from our Chief Executive

Hello there. I hope you and your families are well.

As always, I'd like to start my report with a big thank you to every single Member and customer for your continued support of our Society. To our wonderful Central Co-op difference makers who continue to serve our communities with care and professionalism in too often very difficult circumstances, and to our Board for their continued strength, guidance and support in creating a Sustainable Society for all.

The context

We continue to operate in challenging times and our thoughts are with all those who are living through conflict, poverty and political unrest around the world.

We are continuing to support the Co-op economy with our innovative Malawi project, where Co-op to Co-op support through trade and education is strengthening the Co-operative movement globally as part of a logical extension of Fairtrade.

UK high streets

In August, we all witnessed the riots that took place on our UK streets following the fatal stabbing of 3 children in Southport, and were fuelled by misinformation and disinformation. The new Government acted quickly and decisively mobilising 6,000 public order officers to places of unrest, enlisting specialist teams to tackle online offenders and influencers responsible for inciting violence and ensuring substantive and swift sentencing for those involved.

Thankfully, disruption to our stores was minimal, and our colleagues and people teams stepped up to safeguard all our colleagues, especially those from ethnic communities.

We are committed to playing our part in responding to anti-social behaviour and knife crime in the communities we serve and continue to invest in

defibrillators and bleed kits investing more than £695k over recent years and a further £67.5k in annual maintenance costs so that more than 297 of our Food and Funeral branches are able to provide these critical services at a time of need.

180 years of Co-operation and 30 years of Fairtrade

This year sees our movement celebrate 180 years of Co-operation and 30 years of Fairtrade. As we enter the third year of our Malawi Partnership, we are pleased to see sales of Malawi products in our stores surpass £500,000.

This partnership builds on the legacy of the leadership role Co-ops have had in the development of the Fairtrade movement and is really gathering momentum with wider co-op support.





Co-operative Group along with Mid Counties Co-operative, East of England Co-op, Southern Co-op, Lincolnshire Co-op and Radstock Co-operative Society are now all supporting this project and stocking these products in their stores, helping to significantly accelerate our mission to take Malawi out of poverty.

International Co-operative Development Fund

As part of a continuous commitment to support co-operative growth and to mark the UN International Year of Co-operatives in 2025. A new International Co-operative Development Fund (ICDF) is set to be launched in the UK later this year. Our Society will be a founding member of this Fund which will see Co-ops working together in solidarity to support co-operatives around the world in times of crisis and need, but also to support long term co-operative development overseas.

Building links with a new government

In July, the country took to the polling stations and elected a new Labour government led by the Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer MP. 43 Labour and Co-operative MPs form part of the new Labour government who will champion and further the cause of co-operation.

Following the election, we have written to the new Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers and all newly elected and re-elected members of parliament. We will work more closely with the government to support their mission to double the size of the Co-operative and mutual sector, and we've

already seen a really positive response with a number of new MPs scheduling visits to our stores during the Autumn.

These include making work pay through a reformed jobs market, the pledge of a 'New Deal for Working People', a focus on UK energy and cleaner power as we strive for green energy self-sufficiency, and work to understand the causes of and address the impacts of Retail crime, along with a commitment to reform of current planning rules to provide local communities with the infrastructure and amenities that they need.

Retail Crime

The level of crime in our Society, especially our food stores sadly continues to increase. In the first half of the year, our stores experienced just over 21,000 incidents in total, of which 1,200 were classified as 'violent', with our colleagues experiencing direct or indirect harm. The value of leakage (Total Loss) is approximately £4.7m YTD, with fresh meat & fish, confectionery, household, health & beauty, coffee and beers, wines & spirits being the items most targeted by criminals in our stores.

Our Board, led by our Society President Elaine Dean have demonstrated outstanding leadership on this issue, using their wider networks and connections to lobby for change and together we have succeeded in changing the law, with the July King's Speech confirming that the assault of a shopworker will now be a standalone offence as part of the new Crime and Policing Bill.

A Message from our Chief Executive

continued

Membership and Democracy

We know that Membership is key to our long-term commercial success, and in the first half of the year we have been working hard to develop a new Member offer, which is meaningful, relevant to a new generation of Co-op members and ensures that however members choose to access our goods and services, they are at the heart of how we do business.

You, our Members, have been actively shaping the future of Membership, sharing your ideas and feedback through our surveys. Over 15,000 Members gave feedback in our engagement survey earlier this year – thank you for your inputs. More than 17,000 Members participated in selecting Samaritans as the Society's new charity partner. Looking forward we are committed to how we engage with our Members to encourage economic and democratic participation with the Society. We're partnering with Lobyco, part of Co-op Denmark to launch new and exciting features to our Membership App to deliver against what Members told us matters to them including how you're rewarded when shopping with us.

We'll be piloting new features in the new year, and look forward to launching a revitalised Membership experience in 2025.

Looking forward we are committed to how we engage with our members such as investment in our App and look forward to sharing information at our Annual meeting in May of a member bonds programme.

Our Society performance

We had a number of significant sporting events this Summer including England's Men's football team reaching the final of the European Championships in Germany and Team GB and Paralympics GB finishing 7th and 2nd respectively

in the medal table at Olympics and Paralympics that took place in Paris during August and September.

These sporting events brought much needed distraction from the dreadful weather with our stores seeing some uplift in sales, although this did not cover the impact of unseasonably bad weather throughout much of the Spring and summer with the Met Office reporting rainfall levels 32% higher across the UK during Spring and the coolest summer since 2015.

Alongside this poor weather, economic conditions have remained challenging for both business and consumer spending during the first half of the year. Since 2022, the impact from elevated energy and food prices, the war in Ukraine, high interest rates, a tight labour market with accelerating wage rises and ongoing global supply chain issues have driven up inflation.

As some of these dynamics have begun to ease, geo-political tensions in the Middle East and Red Sea shipping routes have pressured oil prices and the cost of supply. The extended cost-of-living crisis has driven caution in spending but as wage rises now outpace inflation, there is potential to re-build household finances. For the year to July 2024, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) measured the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) at 2.2% after meeting the Bank of England's official target of 2% in May. Food inflation was 1.5% in June and July; the lowest since October 2021. The Labour Government's Budget in October is expected to present both opportunities and some financial challenges for businesses and individuals and we closely monitor the impact for the Society.

Our financial headlines included gross sales of £484.5m, which were a decrease of £14.3m (-2.9%) to the comparable period last year from continuing operations.

Our distribution centre closed in January 2024 and accounted for £33.3m in sales to other Societies in the first half of the last financial year.

Our trading profit was £4.1m, a reduction of £2.2m to the same period last year from continuing operations, -£3.5m in total. We have seen price inflation fall quickly in the year to date with July reaching over half the level expected (1.5% versus 3.3%) which has impacted the value of our Food sales and within Funeral, the decline in death rate has reduced the number of arrangements driving a -£2.9m adverse impact to the trading profit.

Capital expenditure of £11.0m has allowed the Society to open two new Food stores, regenerate fifteen Food stores and four Funeral homes whilst rolling out digital shelf edge labels, investing in colleague safety and further solar panels reflecting our short to medium-term ambition of being energy self-sufficient. In total, we are committed to investing £42m in our growth plans for this financial year.

Net debt of £26.3m increased compared to last year (2023: £20.5m) as a result of continued commitment to capital investment but remained well within our debt facility of £50m. The Society's net assets reflect a reduction in stock from the distribution centre closure but are broadly consistent at £270.7m compared to last year (2023: £273.1m).

Investing in the Future of our Society

Members, customers and our colleagues are at the heart of our decisions and following our strategic review with external consultants OC&C, the Society is focused on delivery of its five-year plans for Food, Funeral and Property. We have significant opportunities to increase productivity across our business as we look to delivering our purpose of creating a sustainable society for all.



A Message from our Chief Executive

continued

In Food this means a focus on reasons to shop; ensuring we are convenient, reliably in stock with the right products, emphasizing our co-operative difference (such as our Malawi range), well-priced and understanding the missions behind each shop whilst driving down our overall cost to serve.

In Funeral, we have looked at our geographical coverage and how we care for our communities. We have invested in digitizing back of house care and look forward to sharing more of our journey in May.

We are well supported with a broad property portfolio that supports our commercial business and provides opportunities for our broader strategic aspirations such as our route to Net Zero. In ensuring space in each site is used effectively, we have the opportunity to engage further within the communities that we operate in.

We have also invested significantly in colleague pay and earlier this year increased our minimum hourly pay beyond the Living Wage to £12.00 with paid breaks and a suite of additional benefits aimed at enhancing the well-being and flexibility of our colleagues. We will continue to invest in making work pay whilst challenging our broader cost of operation to make these choices that matter.

Reviewing our Strategy

Within our plans, we have continued to work in partnership with our Board on our core objectives to grow membership, increase our sales to young people and green energy self-sufficiency. We are pleased to share that we remain on track, to achieve performance targets set by our Board.

In July, we also spent valuable time with our Board to look forward and consider

the long-term direction of the Society and aligned on themes for exploration over the upcoming months.

We heard from external speakers representing the British Retail Consortium, the National Association of Funeral Directors and Animorph Co-op, a Co-op specialising in the Artificial Intelligence workspace. The sessions help us to consider our strategy in a rapidly changing external environment and ensure our direction continues to support members, our purpose and our colleagues.

In addition to our long-standing strategic priorities, a further 3 core strategic themes emerged that the Board and Executive team will begin to explore over the coming months.

Firstly, we have made a broad commitment to work more closely with our other Independent Co-op partners as part of more efficient and collaborative ways of working. To date we have examples of cross Society agreement within utility spend, in store security technology, colleague electric vehicles and we're looking at further opportunities particularly across overheads and technology.

Within the context of competition law, we have started work alongside Lincoln Co-op, Mid Counties Co-op, Southern Co-op and Scotmid Co-op on "Symphony" a shared IT system that manages stock availability in our stores. The Society has also teamed up with East of England Co-op to incorporate it's 'Watch Me Now' security technology into our stores and rolled out the electric vehicle scheme ran as part of a partnership between Octopus Energy and Mid Counties Co-operative to Society colleagues.



Second, we will be establishing a Policies and Campaigns Group to guide us through opportunities with the new government as part of a movement wide ambition to double the size of the Co-op economy and bring about societal and social change.

Finally, we remain committed to exploring new business opportunities, with an initial priority to focus on our strategic work to improve our core businesses of Funeral and Food.

As we look to the year ahead, I want to make sure that we are set up to deliver our strategy in each of our businesses and unlock the potential of all our difference maker colleagues.

We have recently announced changes to simplify the Society's Executive and leadership team structure to help us deliver our plan and to give greater clarity and focus to our Food, Funeral and Property businesses.

As part of these changes, Paul Dennis will be leaving the Society's Executive team with our very best wishes for the future.

I wanted to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to Paul for everything he has delivered for our Society including his leadership of all our colleagues through the COVID pandemic, his welcome and support of colleagues from the former Mid-Counties Funeral business and overseeing the successful migration of our stores to the LIDIA distribution network.

Looking forward to 2025 – UN Year of Co-operatives

2025 is the UN Year of Co-operatives and working closely with the ICA and its new Director-General, Jeroen Douglas, there is a huge opportunity for UK Co-ops to build on the range of movement-wide activity and celebrations that have taken place this year to celebrate 180 years of Co-operation and 30 years of Fairtrade.

We are already thinking about how our Society can play its part in 2025 and celebrate its own achievements with both the local and global communities that we are able to support thanks to the loyalty of our customers and members.

We believe that our own strategy, which is guided by founding co-operative values and principles and made relevant for members today, allows us to be positive about the future as we head into this special year. We are surrounded by difference makers with the power to work collaboratively to seize opportunities and face any challenges head on. I'd like to thank each and every colleague for their hard work and commitment to make a difference to our Members and customers every day.



Debbie Robinson
Chief Executive Officer

Our Highlights



Food

New store openings in Hethersett and Scunthorpe

The Society opened new Food stores in Hethersett and Scunthorpe during the first half of the year.

As part of the Society's commitment to supporting the local community, the Scunthorpe store includes a free water fountain, defibrillator and community notice board and the store has teamed up with the Trussell Trust Scunthorpe Foodbank to enable customers to contribute food items to support those in need.

In Hethersett, community services offered at the store include free bike repair and water refill stations, car tyre air pump, In-Post lockers and community notice board.

Designed with sustainability and community in mind, the store features eco-friendly fridges, EV chargers, a free bike repair station and a defibrillator. In collaboration with the Trussell Trust Scunthorpe, a dedicated food donation point has been installed where members and customers can contribute food items to support those in need.

Re-generation activity

The Society continues to invest in its existing store estate. Stores in Leicester, Stapenhill, Brampton, Rolleston-On-Dove, Rising Brook, Moseley, Market Deeping, Birmingham and Ashby De La Zouch have all been brought up to brand standards as part of the re-generation programme in the first half of the year.

Distribution networks

In April 2024, the Society completed the move of all its Food stores into Co-operative Group's LIDIA distribution network. The transition has gone smoothly, and stores are benefitting from a 7-day delivery schedule which has improved the availability of fresh produce and other core items.

Member prices

The Society has stepped up its commitment to member pricing, adding 180 Member deals during Co-op Fortnight as part of activity to mark 180 years of co-operation in 2024. These prices provide significant discounts on a variety of everyday items to members, encouraging more and more customers to sign up to the benefits of membership.



Offender rehabilitation

During July, Food colleagues spent the day with West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner’s “Offender to Rehab” programme meeting many of the people the programme has helped and hearing about their journey from offending to rehabilitation. The activity forms part of a wider commitment to building partnerships with organisations which are looking to address the root causes of crime, particularly focusing on issues of addiction and societal vulnerability.

Funerals

Ongoing investment in estate

Re-branding has been completed at Funeral homes including Cheltenham and Lichfield and the Great Brook Street care centre in Birmingham.

Member rewards

In May, the Society launched new Member rewards for its funeral business, including Member incentives for will writing services and a choice between a selection of personalised items when arranging a funeral including a floral sheaf, floral heart, ashes casket, coffin engraving or masonry lettering.

Funeralsafe

The Society has launched a new partnership with Funeral Safe Ltd to provide members and customers with financial planning support when purchasing a Funeral product. Funeral Safe provides simple, accessible and affordable finance for covering funeral costs and is authorised and regulated by the FCA and offers peace of mind for families.

Community Open Days

During July, Funeral colleagues organised a range of community open days at branches including Northfield and Spondon where members and customers were able to meet Funeral community champions, find out more about funeral planning and see how our florist colleagues create beautiful displays.

Our Highlights

continued



Membership

In May, the Society launched “Co-op Generation”, a pilot programme to offer customers who are under 16 a gateway into joining Membership. Young customers could apply for a Co-op Generation card which is linked to a parent or guardian’s Membership account and provides them with access to offers such as lunchtime meal deal discounts and early career opportunities.

Once Co-op Generation cardholders reach 16 years of age, they become eligible for full Central Co-op Membership. Over 200 Co-op Generation accounts are now active and this activity is helping the Society explore how junior and / or family membership might form part of its new membership offer.

Member democratic participation

In May, 5,999 members voted in the 2024 Board Director elections, an increase of more than 10% versus last year. In a Co-op first, Central Co-op members were able to access the voting website directly from the Society app.

Following the elections, the Society is pleased to welcome 5 new Directors to the Board, including the first colleague Director from the Funerals business.

Campaigning and community

Malawi Partnership

Central Co-op’s Malawi Partnership continues to make a difference to communities in Malawi.

This international trading partnership is supporting the Malawi Federation of Co-operatives (MAFECO) and co-operative smallholder farmers and the Society will shortly be stocking the UK’s first ever Fairtrade certified macadamia nut product.

Due to land in stores later this year, this product demonstrates an ongoing commitment to supporting Fairtrade and improving the lives of the Malawian farmers.

Central Co-op continues to campaign for producers and farmers to receive a fair deal for their products, empowering them to sustainably improve their trading opportunities and livelihoods.



New Charity Partner

In July, nearly 17,000 members and colleagues voted to select Samaritans as the Society's new charity partner.

This follows work throughout the first half of the year to finalise a shortlist of potential charity partners after colleagues and members fed back that they would like to see the Society placing more focus on initiatives to support mental health.

The new partnership will launch in October after more than £2.5 million was raised to support Dementia UK, the Society's charity partner over the past 7 years.

Community Dividend

The Society's Community Dividend scheme shared more than £15,000 between 40 charities in March, supporting good causes that are central to our communities with focus on access to food, health and well-being and improving the environment. The Scheme is currently paused and will be re-launched with an improved application process and localised decision making in early 2025.

Sustainability

In March 2024, the Society won the Convenience Awards category for Sustainability Retailer of the Year due to outstanding commitment to environmental responsibility and sustainability.

Food Waste

The Society continues to tackle food waste and promote Sustainability with online food redistribution partner Olio, and announced a full rollout across all Central Co-op stores during Stop Food Waste Day 2024, marking a significant milestone in the fight against food waste and food poverty.

Green Energy Self-Sufficiency

The Society generated more than 17% of its own energy during the first half of the year,, saving more than £140,000 in energy costs.

We have also reached a significant milestone by achieving Net-Zero for energy consumption in six of its stores, two of which even surpassed this achievement by earning carbon negative accreditation.

Our Colleagues

Wagestream

In July, the Society launched Wagestream, as part of its commitment to colleague financial wellbeing.

Wagestream is an online tool which enables colleagues to access 50% of earned pay ahead of pay-day, save money with a competitive interest rate, track finances and access benefits to support themselves and families.

Hourly pay increase

In April, the Society announced the increase of minimum pay to £12.00 an hour highlighting its investment in colleagues with a pay increase, paid breaks and a suite of additional benefits aimed at enhancing colleague well-being and flexibility.

The pay increase equates to an additional £2,535 per annum for a full-time customer service assistant and benefits include annual health checks & virtual GP, free counselling sessions, access to a nutritionist and Wellbeing champions.

Our Highlights

continued



Supporting Colleague Wellbeing

Launched after Mental Health Awareness Week, the Society's "We've got you" wellbeing campaign is dedicated to prioritising the mental, physical and emotional wellbeing of all colleagues including free counselling sessions, three volunteering days a year, enhanced maternity and paternity leave policies, menopause and fertility support initiatives and hybrid working.

Inspiring Young People

During Co-op Fortnight, 300 work experience placements were offered in Society food stores, funeral home and support centre roles, and a further 1,500 students participated in employability workshops through the Society's "adopt a school" programme.

Diversity and Inclusion

Women's Voices

The Society provided a series of spaces for women in co-operatives to meet, learn and share experiences during International Women's Day 2024.



A free event was organised to facilitate discussions and networking amongst women Members and colleagues, including guest speakers and inspirational workshops.

Pride Activity

Over the Summer, the Society participated in nine Pride events across its trading area this beginning with Birmingham Pride in May followed by events in Peterborough, Corby, Lichfield, Chesterfield, Belper, Lowestoft, Ashby-de-la-Zouch and Stafford. The Society took the opportunity to reinforce its commitment to building an inclusive and diverse working culture where everyone is welcome.

Central Co-op marked Pride month by sharing colleagues' podcast stories, health and wellbeing advice and by launching its new LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Network led by its executive sponsor, Andy Peake.

HMRC business review

We are delighted that following their Business Risk Review, HMRC have provided the Society with an overall "low" risk rating, improving on the "moderate" rating received last year. All tax areas are now deemed low risk.



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Membership & Community Report

Our Members and the communities we serve are central to the success of our Society and the loyalty of our members enables us to invest in our Co-op, provide Member rewards, and support our communities through a range of different activities.

Our Membership and Community Councils (MCCs) are made up of active members from across the Society's trading area and help to co-ordinate our membership and community activity plans.

In the first half of the year, MCCs delivered a wide range of activity to support the Society's strategic priorities and a snapshot of this activity is summarised below:

Member participation

MCC members attended the UK Society of Co-operative Studies annual conference, hosted at the new Support Centre. Members were able to upskill themselves on the reach of the co-operative sector in the UK and worldwide and share best practice around effective member engagement and education. Members also attended Co-op Congress in Birmingham and younger members attended the Youth Summit, taking place alongside Congress.

Southern Region worked closely with store colleagues to promote membership at Evington Road Store in Leicester to celebrate Eid, Thrapston Charter Fair, Dying Matters Week at Oakham Store and at a residents meeting in Houlton, Rugby.

The Singing for Health group which takes place in the Community Room at Halesworth has attracted more new members following outreach activity in the local community.

Colleagues, members & the Eastern MCC supported and attended an event to commemorate British navigator, Matthew Flinders that included a litter pick around the Donnington store.

Western MCC supported Atherstone store with a member awareness event, held colleague engagement events at the Eastham and Preston stores and supported Northfield Funeral Home with their open day.





Member groups across the Society's trading area continue to be well attended. A number of pilot groups focusing on young people are also being supported to provide access to Co-op resources and increase their awareness of sustainability and ethical trade.

'Orton Makers' a New Members Group in Orton, Peterborough was launched earlier this year and provides members with crafting opportunities, friendship & support with mental health.

Over 260 members took part in the Heritage visits to places of co-operative interest including a visit to the new Support Centre in Lichfield.

Across our store estate, our community rooms and Insomnia café outlets continue to thrive, providing local groups with space to meet regularly and connect with our stores.

Robert Owen's great achievements were celebrated with the installation of a clock commemorating Owen on the Belper Store. The clock was designed by local artist Andy Myers and is part of a wider activity by the North MCC to celebrate co-operative heritage.

Northern MCC also launched the Ripley Trail, a microsite capturing people's historic stories of their times either working or living in Ripley, which is accompanied by a trail around the town. Both young people and active members are accessing the site and completing the walk to find out about the different locations of historical interest.

Sustainable communities

During Big Green Week, Southern MCC partnered with Funeral colleagues to promote greener Funeral planning options in Market Harborough, showcasing 'new to fleet' electric limousines and partnering with a local natural burial group.

Eastern MCC co-ordinated a Food & seed swap with Co-op Pioneers in Huntingdon & attended a Big Green Picnic in Hethersett.

Yorkshire MCC continued its partnership work with fair&funky and delivered a set of upcycling workshops in schools to celebrate Eco Day.

Northern MCC supported Belper Goes Green and Littleover Goes Green, promoting a range of Society green energy initiatives.

Western region MCC teamed up with Co-operative Group Member Pioneers in Birmingham at the opening of an eco-garden community space which helps the local community grow plants together and learn about the eco-system in a safe environment.

Bike events were organised in all regions during the first half of the year to promote sustainability and the Society's bike repair facilities.

Membership & Community Report

continued

Working with young people

Western Region delivered Fairtrade awareness sessions with a number of local Fairtrade group and have led the re-launch of Fairtrade Association Birmingham which will relaunch during Fairtrade Fortnight 2024. The MCC also delivered a Rice Challenge with Streethay School, where students and families purchased rice from the Society's Malawi range to learn about how the rice sold in stores is helping farmers send their children to school.

Southern MCC completed Ethical Challenge workshops with Squirrel and Beaver groups in Broughton Astley Store. The Mind your Money game created by Northern MCC has continued to engage young adults with workshops at Ripley Academy, the Holmfirth Youth Group and a school in Scunthorpe to support the opening of the new store.

Western region has delivered Healthy Choices Workshops in schools and community groups, as well as talking about Healthy Choices at several events including the Community Games in Lichfield and Sutton Coldfield.

Anti-bullying, Co-op Values and Healthy Choices workshops were organised in schools in the Corby area and the Southern MCC also supported holiday and fun activities in Coalville and Leicester.

Lots more information has been added to morethana.coop. This Co-op microsite now includes early careers, and information about working for a Co-op and other resources to enhance the learning experience for young people.

Celebrating Diversity and Inclusion

All MCCs are also committed to celebrating the diversity of the communities in which our Society trades and deliver a range of events and activities with under-represented groups which have included:

The partnership with the Centre for Ethnic Health based at the Leicester University has continued to grow, with workshops delivered to Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities in the area. The Insomnia Cafe in Blaby has also hosted a "Time to Talk" Day as part of activity to support Mental Health Awareness Week.

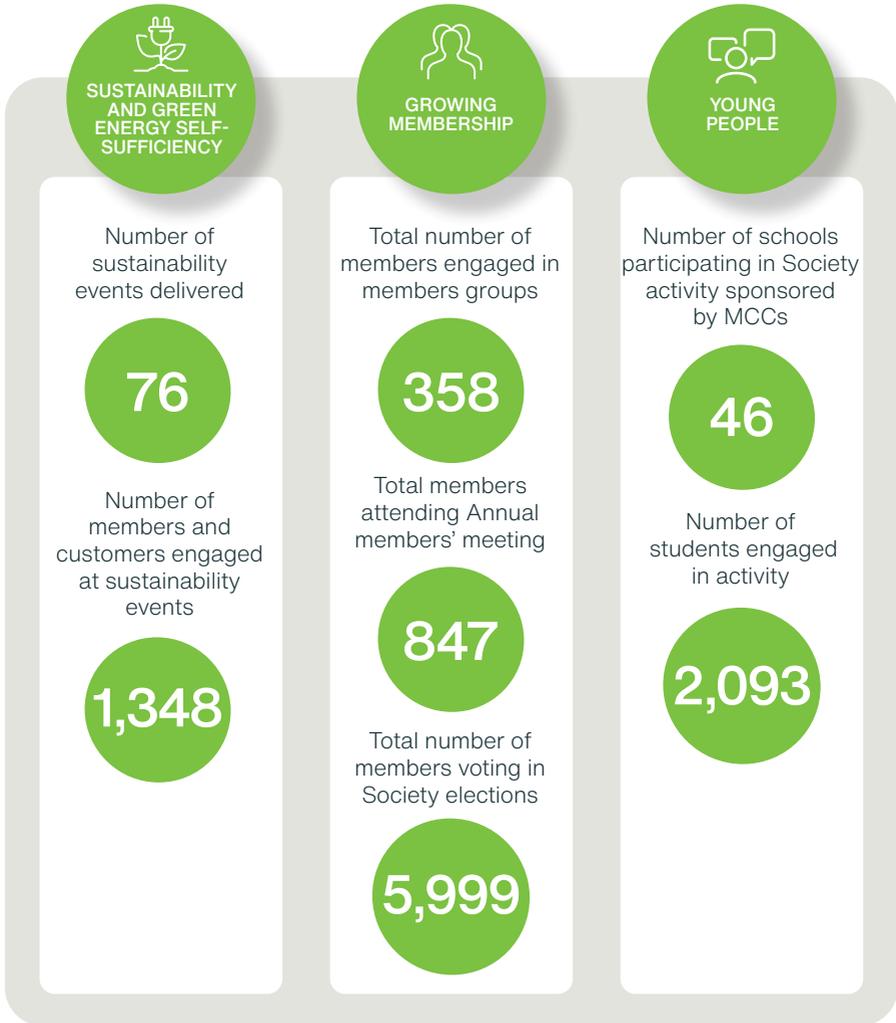
Eastern MCC have worked on a partnership project with Partners Project Abundance & H.E.L.P to deliver a weekly cooking club with young refugees in Peterborough.

Teaming up with colleagues from the Food and Funeral business, all MCCs supported Pride activities over the Summer as part of the Society's campaign to raise awareness of the health and wellbeing of the LGBTQIA+ community. The Society was well represented at events in Corby, Chesterfield, Birmingham, Lichfield, Stafford, Lowestoft and Peterborough.

To celebrate International Women's Day in March, Eastern MCC attended a Women's Day networking event in St Neots partnering up with the integrated neighbourhood team and Northern MCC supporting a Women's Day event in Chesterfield.

Measuring activity in numbers

In 2024, MCCs have started to measure the impact they are making in local communities in support of the Society's 3 strategic objectives.



Visit our new website and find out more

In August, a new MCC home page was launched which provides more information on MCCs and the different parts of the Society trading area they each covers.

Visit www.members.coop/mcc to find out more about activity in your area and how to get more involved.

Board of Directors and Executive Team

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Sarah Dickins – Chief Operating Officer, Food, Marketing and Brand

Andy Peake – Chief Operating Officer, Funeral, Property and People

Society Secretary

Andrew Seddon



Central **coop**

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and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014

Registered No 10143R