

The Difference



*The Midcounties Co-operative
Annual General Meeting of Members*

WELCOME

Hello and welcome to The Difference – the magazine for members of The Midcounties Co-operative. We've got another packed issue for you, full of stories about how your Society makes a difference and about how you can get involved. I'm delighted to welcome some new colleagues to your membership team and they are introduced on this page – so read on. We'd love to know what you think of The Difference and we really value your suggestions so please contact us if you have something to say.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Di Bateman

Di Bateman

Membership manager



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New Faces



Olivia Gardner is the new membership administrator. Olivia used to work in the Co-op Travel branch in Summertown and has an interest in working with young people and in Fairtrade. "Since joining the Society I've been working on the Southern AGM, which was a fantastic induction to the world of membership. I'm really enjoying my role and my main objective is to improve communication with members and to encourage more members to engage with the Society. The team is working hard to increase our member base and I think it is going to be an exciting year for the membership department."

Mike Pickering is the southern membership development co-ordinator. Before joining the Society he worked on healthy living campaigns with community groups in East Anglia. "In my new role I hope to be able to use my experience in membership promotion and community work to increase awareness of, and opportunities for, members to become active. I would like to do this by developing links with schools, universities, community leaders, ethnic groups and other co-operators."



Superdividend not just Another Card!

Take out your **superdividend** card right now and have a look at it. It's not just another loyalty card, what you are holding in your hand is the key to the difference - the difference that makes The Midcounties Co-operative special. The card is your right to earn points for supporting an organisation that you own. It represents your right to have a say in the policies which shape your co-operative and gives you free entry to events and meetings where you can stand up, have your say and be counted. This little card is your way of supporting the local communities in which you live and of supporting other members and customers just like you.

More than 120,000 people are now using their **superdividend** card on a regular basis to take advantage of the better deals and offers that there are for members. More than 60,000 new members have joined since the introduction of **superdividend** and more members are now getting involved with the Society. Every time you shop in one of our branches, attend one of the Society's events or even vote in the elections you receive points which are converted twice a year into money off vouchers. You can spend these with the Society or you can do what lots of other members do and donate them to charity.



Look again at what you have in your hand – now can you see the difference?

Action Packed AGMs

Members Back Campaigns

Nearly 300 members packed the Annual General Meetings of Members held in Walsall and Cirencester. The theme was MOCA (Marketing Our Co-operative Advantage) and it was an ideal opportunity to thank members for their support with the Society's campaigns. Local suppliers and community leaders were also invited to present to members about how the MOCA campaigns had made a real difference to them.

The day was an interactive one with members having lots of opportunities to put across their thoughts and suggestions. A question and answer session in the afternoon showed that members are really behind the Society's campaigns and want to see their Society developing as a campaigning force in the future. For those of you who couldn't attend, or if you want to read the presentations you can visit www.midcounties.coop to view the day.



“Great Event”

“For my first AGM I thought it was very informative and very well organised”

“Well staffed and organised
- the best ever”

“I really liked the interactive Q&A sessions - more of this please”

“Well done to everyone”

It was an emotional day too, as we said farewell to Bob Burlton our chief executive for 19 years. Bob will still be involved with the Society and we are sure that all members will wish him well in his new ventures.

Thank you to everyone that attended the meetings. On this page are some of the comments you made about the event. The feedback and the participation on the day show that members really to want to make a difference. If you would like to get more involved with our campaigns please contact Olivia Gardner on **01865 256273** or email olivia.gardner@midcounties.coop

Help us make The Midcounties Co-operative the way you want it to be....



Keeping it Local

Children from Ladygrove Primary School cut the ribbon to re-open the Co-op store at the Ladygrove Local Centre in Didcot. The store had been closed for a few weeks whilst it underwent a total transformation to a Co-operative Local Store. It now offers the very latest in modern convenience shopping.

The Co-operative Local Store format has been specially created and includes a bright colour scheme and wood-plank flooring. The retail focus is on fresh foods with a wide range of fresh fruit and vegetables, ready meals, ice-creams, chilled beers, lagers and wines, plus fresh each day; bread, cakes and pastries.



Stuart Gillett, store manager said: "We were delighted to have children from the local school along to help us re-launch our store. We hope that people will realise that the Co-op is different; we are a member owned co-operative society and an important part of the community."



Margaret's on a Mission

Margaret Hampton's hard work to raise money for a school project in an underprivileged area in the Gambia has inspired her colleagues in Co-op Travel Direct to get involved too. Margaret has raised over £900 to finance the building of two classrooms at the nursery school in Bakau and to sponsor 15 children for a year. Margaret's colleagues were so impressed by her efforts that they decided to start collecting and donating stationery and supplies for her to send to the school.

Margaret said, "I was moved to get involved in this project following a friend's introduction to the school on a visit last year. Every little thing we can do makes such a big difference because the school relies on donations and good will."

Digging for the Community

When Christchurch Primary School in Walsall asked for volunteer help to improve part of a large area of ground behind their school, a team from our funeral group rose to the challenge. The team of seven set to work on what was one of the hottest days of the year and did battle with knee high nettles and swarms of creepy crawlies. However, slowly but surely their hard work paid off. After toiling for nearly seven hours they had a full skip, had planted bedding plants and shrubs and they could really see what they had achieved through their hard graft and team work.

Julia Morris from Walsall New Deal Wildlife Trust, which is overseeing the project said, "A big thank you to the team from The Midcounties Co-operative, their work has really helped us towards our goal."



An Encouraging Result

The first-ever end of year figures for The Midcounties Co-operative show an encouraging start for the recently merged Society. The results, which were unveiled at a packed Annual General Meeting of Members, show an underlying trading profit of £6.3m. This is excluding exceptional items which were mainly the costs of bringing the two businesses together at the time of the merger. The net assets now stand at £146.2m and members' share capital is £31m.

Chief executive Ben Reid said, "These are encouraging results following significant work to merge the two societies successfully. It is obvious that we are now building the businesses and our foundation is a strong one for the future."



Ben Reid

Keeping up the Standard

The motor group has achieved the newly revised, more challenging standard of Investor in People. It was the first part of the southern region to gain IIP status in 2001 and was successfully reassessed in 2003. The new IIP standard requires more rigorous business processes and more ambitious goals that must be met. The work has been supported by an eight-strong team from all sites and all levels of the motor group.

Motorworld colleagues have worked hard to make changes and improvements to apply the IIP principles. One example is the introduction of the Balanced Scorecard, a plan which gives an overview of business strategy, encouraging creativity, improvements and new ideas.

Gaining the Investor in People award demonstrates that an organisation recognises the value of its people, their performance and the contribution they make to the success of the business. The personnel services group team is working with other areas of the co-operative to gain the new, more challenging standard.



Pictured right - Some of the motor group IIP steering committee (from left): Bill Kinchella, Barbara Pitman, Nigel Bishop, Richard Evans and Neil Young.

Recycling Starts Early

Learning about recycling cannot start too early so the Imagine Co-operative Childcare nursery in Swindon invited parents and children to a special re-cycling evening workshop.

Nursery manager, Kay Kane explains; "The nursery has recently started using a number of recycling bins and we decided to have a recycling evening; inviting parents and carers into the nursery with their children to take part in fun, creative activities.



"As a co-operative business we encourage our parents to get involved in the nursery and their child's day-care and as part of the evening we offered a range of activities both indoors and outdoors.

These included cardboard and wood printing, recycled water play, sensory collage using tin foil, string, natural objects etc. During the week all the children have taken part in a range of recycling activities.

They have made sound and visual mobiles, collage pictures and decorated large boxes for play. It has been a great week."

Get Involved and

You Can Make a Difference

Currently, in the southern region there are two bodies for which members can stand for election– the Active Members Support Group and the Board of Directors.

The Active Member Support group is made up of 12 active members, who are elected by their fellow members, and two Board members. The group play a vital part in shaping membership by reflecting the needs of members and helping to decide future Society campaigns. The group act on all the feedback received from members by constructing a plan for the future of member activity. These 14 individuals work as a team to make sure the Midcounties Co-operative remains your co-operative.

The group meets quarterly on an informal basis. The meetings are designed to be fun and interactive so that issues can be discussed in an enjoyable manner. The meetings times and dates are decided by those who are elected. Any active member can nominate themselves for a position on the Active Member Support Group by completing a self nomination form. If you would like to join this vital group please complete a form and put yourself forward for election.

The Board of Directors is currently made up of 19 directors, seven former West Midlands (WM) and 12 former Oxford, Swindon & Gloucester (OSG). Following the merger we are now going to adjust the number of directors to 17. This means that there will be 10 available places on the Board. This year, all 12 former OSG directors are eligible for re-election, if they wish. All former WM directors will remain on the Board.

As a member, you have a right to stand for election to the Board of Directors. The position is paid, and full training and support is provided. If you would like more information about this, please contact Caroline Nichols on: **01865 256204**.



Applying the Values

In the northern area, the Community and Membership Development Committee is made up of elected members, employee members and members of the Board of Directors. It meets approximately every six weeks in Walsall and its work involves judging applications for Co-operative Community Dividend, general grants and sponsorship from across the northern region.

The aim of the committee is to ensure that the Society achieves its membership and social objectives through the practical application of its co-operative principles and values. Currently there are no vacancies on the committee, however, details are circulated during election times when vacancies arise.

Calling All Southern Members – Your Co-op needs you!

You will find in this issue an Active Members Needs Survey and a self nomination form. Please complete the survey, your views and opinions really count and we need to incorporate your ideas and suggestions into our future plans for membership.

Do you want to make a difference?

Do you have ideas on how membership can be improved? Then complete the self nomination form and stand for the Active Member Support Group. If elected, you will be involved in shaping the future.

All elected members will attend an induction day and then four meetings during the year where they will get together with like-minded members who deeply care about their co-operative. You can make a difference, so make it today and complete the nomination form. Your Co-op really does need you!



Make a *Difference*

Changing the world – one tin of beans at a time...

Janet Warren, a member of the Active Member Support Group attended the recent Co-operative Congress and Co-operative Group AGM. This is an event which brings together representatives from the whole co-operative movement. This year the main themes were performance, size, brand and membership; all of which sparked passionate debate.

During the debate on performance Janet noted the tension some contributors felt about being successful and being co-operative. She felt that some people dismissed the importance the role that membership plays in achieving success. "I detected a chink in the armour of co-operation ... members seemed to be of secondary importance to customers. If the executive is of a predominantly "business" mindset while the membership is "co-operative" then I believe frustration will be inevitable."

Having listened to the discussions on size, Janet found the arguments disappointing and felt there was no real case put forward for a single retail society for the UK. She found the debate on brand much more convincing: "Prior to the weekend I wasn't convinced about the Brand project. However, the weekend's Brand presentations won me round. If we are to thrive and spread the good news of co-operation to a wider audience, we cannot just sit back with what we know and go no further."

It was the membership debates that really gave Janet inspiration. "At times I felt, to my over critical mind, that membership had slipped rather low on the agenda but there were some real nuggets of inspiration. Bob Burlton said, "Membership is the wind in our sales not an anchor holding us back", and Ben Reid said, "There has to be more to our existence than survival because we own a number of food stores".

Janet found the experience a very valuable one and a very thought provoking one too. "I returned to Midcounties with my mind reeling; it was heady stuff. Lots of presentations were made – some were inspirational, some depressing, some made me incandescent with rage (sufficiently well hidden, I hope) and others were just straight informative or posed those questions we all know we must face."

A full copy of Janet's personal reflection on this Congress is available by contacting the members' hotline on:

0800 435902

Members Get Together

Member groups are made up of active members who meet regularly to discuss various co-operative issues.

Each group has a co-ordinator who liaises with the group to identify topics of importance to be discussed.

Once these topics have been established expert speakers visit these groups to discuss various issues.

These issues can include local community issues, global fairtrade issues or general co-operative issues. Any Co-op member is welcome to attend these informal meetings and there is plenty of opportunity to discuss issues with fellow members. Each individual meeting is advertised within Co-op stores and information is sent directly to people who attend these meetings regularly. Possible future topics include Fairtrade, Co-op membership strategy, local food suppliers, health, environmental issues and wine tasting. A full list of the current member groups can be found in the diary section on page 12.



Film Fun

Film lovers of all ages will be able to enjoy the silver screen in their own village thanks to a Co-operative Community Dividend grant of £800. The grant has been used to buy a DVD film projector for Evenley Village Hall. The projector will be used by the existing film club and there are plans to set up other clubs such as a children's Saturday morning one and one for senior citizens in the afternoons. The nearest cinemas are many miles away from the village and so village film shows will greatly benefit those who cannot travel easily.



Sensory Garden Success

As the warmer weather arrives a Hucclecote playgroup is going ahead with its plans for a sensory garden after receiving a £170 Co-operative Community Dividend grant. The money will buy seeds and equipment for the garden which will be particularly valuable for children to learn about flowers and herbs and about insects and wildlife. Without the grant it would have taken the group over a year to raise enough money for their garden. To celebrate their success, pupils and parents from the playgroup were invited along to perform the opening ceremony at their local Co-op supermarket when it re-opened after a refit.

Singing in Style

The Kidderminster Valentines are getting in tune for their big day at the Royal Albert Hall with sheet music bought with a Co-operative Community Dividend grant of £300. The female voice choir is taking part in the Festival of Brass and Voices at the famous London venue in November this year. They will join other choirs and brass bands from across the country in a concert to raise money for Cancer Research UK. Around 60 of the Valentines will travel to London for the concert and the following morning they will be continuing their fundraising by busking around Covent Garden.



Get With the Beat

A £500 grant has allowed Sporting Khalsa in Walsall to buy ten dhol drums, an instrument which originated in 15th century Punjab. The group was formed as a football club in 1994 – now including ten youth and adult teams – and launched a musical class last year. Inder Grewal, treasurer for Sporting Khalsa, said: "We started teaching the dhol to offer something different to children who would prefer something like this to playing football. It also gives them a flavour of the culture behind music, as the dhol is linked to Sikh history and Punjabi folklore".



Community Celebrations

In our last issue we introduced our new Co-operative Community Festival support scheme to you. So far, we've had a great response with at least 17 events receiving support. We have also had excellent feedback from our local volunteers helping out with running stalls promoting The Midcounties Co-operative. Colleagues from branches such as Highworth and Nailsworth enjoyed being out in their communities, and received a good deal of praise from our active member volunteers!

Supporting all of these local events has also earned us excellent publicity, on posters, programmes, in the press and with many of the community websites featuring a link to www.midcounties.coop! Don't forget there are more festivals still coming up over the next months:

Shropshire & Midwest Festival – 24 – 25 June
Wyre Forest - July
Music at the Crossroads, Hook Norton – 1 July
Faringdon Peace Fete – 1 July
Cowley Road Carnival presents: Eat the World on Cowley Road – 2 July
Lydney Festival, The Big Picture & Jazz in the Park – 9 July
Church Stretton – 9 July
Minsterley - August
Tackley Gala Day – 12 August
Podsmead Community Day, Gloucester – 12 August
Wychwood Forest Fair – 27 August
Charlbury Street Fair – 16 September
Bewdley Festival - 6 – 14 October



If you would like to find out more call us on 01865 256 272 or email communityfestivals@midcounties.coop



Kat Luddecke at Coleford Festival - one of many community events being supported this year.

Moving On

Work on supporting festivals has been led by Kat Luddecke from the community team. Kat is now leaving the Society to start an exciting new role with the East Oxford County Council. In her many years with the Society she has championed the co-operative ethos and she has worked hard to forge lasting links between the Society and the wider co-operative movement.

Kat remains committed to the co-operative values and the community as she will demonstrate in her new role. We all wish her well and we look forward to seeing her at member events in the future.



EXCLUSIVE MEMBERS OFFERS

Don't forget to click onto the exclusive website for all updated offers just for members. This site is full of discounts, competitions and great holiday ideas.

CLICK NOW www.memberexclusive.coop

1. Book a late deal holiday to depart in July 2006 and receive 250 bonus points
2. Join the Members' Travel club and collect an extra 250 bonus points
3. Triple superdividend points when you book car hire
4. Double superdividend points when you book a Co-op Travel City Break departing in 2006.

save, save
with
superdividend

CALL 0870 017 1117 to book any of the offers shown **9**

Campaigning to Make a Difference



At this year's Annual General Meeting Steve Moralee – brand manager, delivered a passionate

presentation on the campaign work of the Society and Di Bateman – membership manager, presented the proposed membership strategy. This strategy will create opportunities for members to campaign, support, promote, discuss and help to shape the Society's future campaigning work.

The session included an interactive voting session to enable the Society to consult with its members and take their views and opinions into account. The following is the report of the accumulated responses from both the northern and southern AGM.

Here are the questions, the answers are ranked according to your responses.

Question 1

which ONE of these issues do you care about the most?

1. Supporting your local community
2. Child obesity
3. Supporting FAIRTRADE
4. Supporting local farmers and producers
5. Food allergies

In particular, northern members specifically cared about supporting the community. We need to continue to build on the good work currently being carried out by the Society.

Question 2

If you care, and we campaign, what should our style of campaigning be?

1. Championing - leading the way
2. Aggressive – shouting that we are better than our competitors!
3. Promoting existing work
4. Keeping quiet so we don't upset anyone

Championing is our current style, which was clearly demonstrated in our recent Fairtrade campaign.

Question 3

What approach should we take to make a difference in our campaigns?

1. Get involved with the local community to encourage positive action
2. Get involved with the local education sector (eg schools and further education)
3. Provide balanced and positive information
4. To lobby professional and government bodies for positive change

As previously stated the community work we do is a great strength, we will also begin to link with the local education sector to ensure we continue to make a difference

Question 4

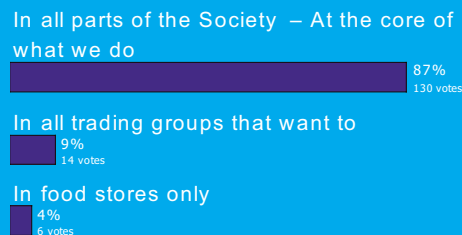
If you could support us campaigning on issues you care about, what ONE thing would you do to help:

1. Volunteer to support in store campaigns – interacting with members and customers
2. Give talks to local community groups to promote our campaign work
3. Lobby Government and professional bodies
4. Be involved in structuring campaigns

From previous work with our partners, we know that interacting with our members and customers has proven to be a great success.

Question 5

Should our campaigning work be:



Question 6

What do you think attracts people to become a member?

1. Getting the dividend
2. Supporting a local store for the local

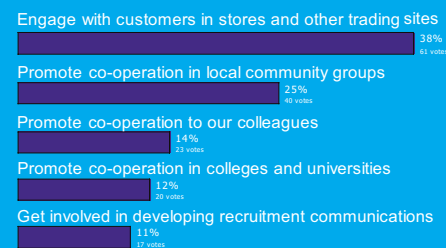
community

3. Our ethical policies (e.g. FAIRTRADE)
4. family loyalty

Last year we gave our £1 million of our profits back to our members in the form of dividend.

Question 7

What one thing would you do to help us recruit more members?



Finally we asked our members; which of these characters best describes the co-op? Out of the list of five possible responses you said..."The local campaigner seeking to improve the area and the world" This fits with the Society's purpose statement of wanting to improve the life of our communities and to create a fairer, better world.

Next steps:

- We will communicate our proposed campaigning programme at the July Members Meetings.
- We will continue to drive our membership forward.
- Currently in all our food stores we have a MOCA superdividend and Membership campaign hi-lighting member benefits.
- In August we plan to continue our work with Honest to Goodness – looking at interacting with children and local groups.
- Finally, as Steve mentioned at the meetings, we will be working towards a unified approach to Local Harvest in the future.

Local Harvest cuts Food Miles

A new range of Shropshire quality meats are the latest local foods to be sold by the Society as part of Local Harvest which supports local growers and producers. The meat is available in stores in parts of the northern region. Embreys are based in Bishop's Castle, Shropshire.

As a co-operative business we are committed to supporting local communities and our Local Harvest scheme is one way we do this. Local Harvest puts local, quality food into the supermarket in a way that works for both retailer and supplier and of course, benefits our customers.

In Embrey's case we are working within a 40 mile radius which significantly meets one of the key Local Harvest aims, which is to keep food-miles to a minimum.

James Embrey, managing director said, "We are very pleased to be a part of the Co-op's aim to put local produce on to supermarket shelves. During the launch of this new partnership we went in to some of the stores. We welcomed the opportunity to meet customers face to face, enabling them to see and understand where the product is coming from."



Co-operatives in the Community

As part of helping communities help themselves, the Society supports Co-operative Futures which offers specialist advice to community and co-operative enterprises. Residents in a village just outside Swindon were so devastated when their one remaining shop closed down that they joined forces to open a community run shop; a project which Co-operative Futures helped them to achieve. The shop has now been open for three years and employs three people who, together with a group of volunteers, keep the shop open seven days a week.

The shop runs as a co-operative with members having a say on how it operates. The shop has also had a positive effect on the environment too as most people leave their cars at home and walk to do their shopping. And it's not just the villagers who are proud of their achievement; in March this year their shop was awarded Village Shop of the Year in a competition run by the magazine Wiltshire Life.

More information about Co-operative Futures can be found by visiting their website: www.co-operativefutures.coop or by ringing 08454 562506.

Blunsdon Village Shop - showing what local people can achieve with co-operation

Co-operative Solutions to Poverty

I recently attended a conference for co-operative councillors, one of the best organised conferences I have attended.

There was an excellent programme of talks during the day, and the one I want to focus on in this short article is the talk by Mark Lyonette on the subject of Co-operative Solutions to Poverty. Mark is the chief executive of ABCUL (Association of British Credit Unions Ltd) and his subtitle was: "What can councils do for credit unions?"

Credit unions are regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA) and are the only authorised deposit takers apart from banks and building societies. New services credit unions offers include Child Trust Funds, cash ISAs and debit cards. We should be aware (and ensure

councils are aware) that the way credit unions are run has changed. They used to operate under the friendly society model, run by volunteers, mainly lending, with a common bond based on a small geographic area.

Now there is a new model, with a 'live or work' common bond, regulated by the FSA (since 2002), with greater credibility and modern financial regulations. Mergers between the old-style credit unions have led to larger 'quality credit unions' more responsive to people's needs and offering savings plans and the use of ATMs as well as lending activities.

ABCUL has developed three strategic partnerships, with Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Co-operative Bank (smile, CIS) and Barclays. There are now typically 3,000-4,000 members (built

up over 2-3 years) in a new credit union, and growth is high in financially excluded areas.

Mark's message was that councils should support credit unions, not just by focusing on poverty but by helping to establish credit union partnerships across employers in their area.

by Jean Nunn-Price



The Clivey Credit Union in Swindon

Active Members' Conference:

The Active Members' Conference will be taking place in the autumn. This will be another exciting event bringing together members from across the Society. The date and venue is currently being confirmed and we will bring you full details as soon as we can. In the meantime if you would like to book a place please contact Olivia Gardner on 01865 256273.

Dates for the Diary

Quarterly Members Meetings (Southern)

Monday 17th July Chipping Norton

Tuesday 18th July Swindon

Wednesday 19th July Gloucester

Thursday 20th July Oxford

Town Hall 19:00 registration 19:30 start

Goddard Arms Hotel - Times as above

Ramada Hotel - Times as above

Oxford Hotel - Times as above

Quarterly Members Meetings (Northern)

25th Walsall The Crossings

26th Kidderminster The Franche 1st School (come & take part in our new style informal meeting!)

27th Shrewsbury Radbrook Primary School (come & take part in our new style informal meeting!)

Member Groups Southern:

Swindon Aug 15th, Sept 19th and Oct 17th all in Old Town Co-op from 2.30pm - 4pm

Carterton : Oct 25th 7.30pm - 9.00pm in Carterton Town Council Hall, Alvescot Road

Stroud: Aug 21st, Sept 18th and Oct 16th 7.30pm - 9.00pm Stroud District Council Offices Ebley Mill

Forest of Dean - Sept 20th - Lydney Methodist Church , Oct 18th - Cinderford Belle Vue Centre both from 2.30pm - 4.00pm



CONTACT US - AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Contact us with your ideas and suggestions for the magazine.

Members' Hotline 0800 435902

email to: thedifference@midcounties.coop

You can also ring the members' hotline if you have any other queries about membership matters.