



How we're supporting the creation of **50 new** **co-operatives**

Update report 2024/25



The Midcounties
Co-operative

Introduction

Co-operative UK's Co-operative and Mutual Economy Report 2024 revealed a record-breaking combined income of £165.7 billion across UK co-ops and mutuals – proof that co-operation is thriving.

As we celebrate Co-operative Fortnight during the UN-designated International Year of Co-operatives, we acknowledge the power of co-operation in reducing inequality, serving member need and supporting local communities. That's why we're so committed to helping the sector grow.

Labour pledged to double the size of the co-op economy in their manifesto and our CEO, Phil Ponsonby, joined others across the sector in offering support for the government's co-operative ambitions after they came into power. In addition, we continue to work closely with the Co-op Party to influence policy, unlock access to capital and remove barriers to co-operative growth.

As a society, we are proactively investing in the growth of the sector by supporting Plunkett UK and Co-operative Futures in the work they do to help establish new co-operatives and community-owned businesses. By doing good together we hope to achieve our 2022 pledge to support the creation of 50 new co-ops by 2027.

This report shares what we've achieved so far in backing new co-ops across our core trading area* and how we'll keep building momentum in the months to come.

Peter Westall

Chief Values Officer
The Midcounties
Co-operative



Working in partnership with...



Plunkett UK

Plunkett is a charity that supports businesses owned by local communities. As well as supplying funding, we provide training and advice on sustainability and retailing to new businesses.



Co-operative Futures

Co-operative Futures is a business development consultancy specialising in co-operative, mutual and community led businesses. We provide financial support and have representation on their board.



ICOF (Co-operative Community Finance)

ICOF lends to established and new co-operatives and community enterprises. Your Co-op provides them with financial support to help them help others.

*Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Buckinghamshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, the West Midlands, Wiltshire and Worcestershire



Why supporting co-ops and community businesses matters to us:

- Co-ops and community businesses focus on what their members and customers need, not just what shareholders want.
- They help reduce inequality and benefit the local community, while also boosting the economy.
- They naturally consider social, economic, and environmental issues in how they operate.
- They come up with creative solutions to the problems their members care about.
- They make decisions with a long-term view, rather than focusing on short-term profits.
- The people who own the business are directly connected to its success and impact.

Strengthening the co-operative economy

Since making our 50 new co-ops pledge in May 2022, we have now supported the creation of **31** new co-ops and community-owned businesses working with our partners.

During the last year...

Plunkett has...



Helped launch **4 new community businesses** in our core trading area.



Delivered **610 hours** of bespoke business support to **start-up groups**.

Responded to **70** new community business enquiries – **50% more than that in 2023**.

Provided **200 hours of business support** to 25 existing organisations.

Co-operative Futures has...



Assisted in the creation of **8 fledgling co-ops** across our core trading area.



Provided support to **22 start-ups and 20 existing co-ops**.

Advised **28 social enterprises** considering becoming co-ops or setting up community asset projects.



Worked with **9 local authorities** on projects supporting co-operative and community development.

33% of community businesses employ those in their **first paid job***

As a result of this work...

During 2024, our communities welcomed:



Since May 2022, our partners have helped launch:



**bright
future**
Co-operative

Bright Future Co-op

We are founding partners of Bright Future Co-op, set up in 2020 to create jobs for survivors of modern slavery. Midcounties also has representation on the Bright Future board. Bright Future continues to thrive. It now has 30 member organisations, including major retailers, and 90 people have so far found work through the programme.

The future of rural retail

In 2024, we were part of Plunkett UK's 'Future of Rural Retail Taskforce', along with community shops and other organisations, including DEFRA. The group is looking at the challenges community-owned shops face and how rural retail needs to change to help villages and small towns stay strong and resilient.



Celebrating Co-op Heroes

The theme of this year's Co-operative Fortnight is Co-op Heroes. We take a look at some of the heroes who have been instrumental in getting these new co-ops off the ground, supporting their communities and helping the co-operative economy thrive.

Lorna and Roger Smalley from The Wolvercote Mill

Injecting life into a community space

With support from Co-operative Futures, a group of local people in Wolvercote, Oxfordshire took on the challenge of transforming a former sales office into a vibrant, community-owned space.

Now a Charitable Community Benefit Society, The Wolvercote Mill is a welcoming hub that offers co-working spaces and rooms for hire, hosting everything from wellbeing sessions and fitness classes to arts, crafts and local events.

Local couple Lorna and Roger have been involved with the project since day one. They run the community café, open three days a week, where volunteers serve affordable hot drinks and lunches to locals of all ages. Every week, Lorna and Roger shop, cook and create a space where everyone feels at home.

They are passionate about improving the volunteer experience for others and hold regular volunteer celebrations, whilst ensuring the community plays an active role in shaping the space.



Mel Cooper from Westbury Community Shop

Bringing the community together through education and fun

As shop manager at Westbury Community Shop, supported by Plunkett UK, Mel Cooper co-ordinates much more than your typical village shop.

Along with her team of staff and volunteers, Mel champions stocking local produce, hosts social events and community cinema evenings, and every Friday the shop stays open late to offer takeaways and drinks to the community – reaching people who feel lonely, isolated and vulnerable.

Mel has established a partnership with a nearby special educational needs school, whereby students with disabilities, health issues and additional learning needs have an opportunity for regular work experience at the shop. She says, "This is what sets us apart as a community business. It takes us time, but it's so worth it. We're helping these young people to develop their confidence and become more independent, while also developing skills which will hopefully help them find a job."



Plans for the future

Looking ahead, we plan to:

- Continue to provide funding and support to our partner organisations to aid in the creation of new co-ops and community-owned businesses.
- Continue to work with others to influence the political landscape to help remove barriers to co-operative growth and build a fairer economy by supporting the government's pledge to double the size of the co-operative sector.

Plus, we'll be on the lookout for other ways to do good together and support new co-ops.

Watch this space!

Community businesses have a five-year survival rate of **99%***

25,000 volunteers and **3,500** staff help drive community businesses forward*



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International Year
of Cooperatives