

Communities

Concern for Community is embedded in our values and principles. It's what sets us apart. This year more than ever, we've seen a need and appetite for a more co-operative approach. One that addressed inequalities and finds new ways to tackle issues together through co-operation.

Our Community plan

Launched in 2019, our community plan Co-operate 2022 focused on connecting communities through our assets and partnerships to address challenging social and economic issues. Using insights from our [Community Wellbeing Index](#), members, colleagues and causes, we identified these issues as skills, spaces and wellbeing. You can see how we progressed against the commitments we made in these areas on pages 84-85 and in our Spaces update below.

As the events of 2020 unfolded, we recognised a need to evolve our plan, ensuring it is pointed firmly at tackling the inequalities that communities are experiencing.

Our work during the crisis - as well as our insights - helped us understand what communities need and the areas where we can have the greatest impact.

We identified 3 interrelated community missions:

- Fair Access to Food
- Fair Access to Mental Wellbeing Support
- Fair Access to Education & Employment for young people

Our approach is built on the strong foundations of our expertise, assets and credibility that we've built up over many years. But we know we can't achieve our plan alone. That's why we're partnering with others, such as community organisations, charities and academies to create lasting impact.



Watch how we aim to build stronger and more resilient communities here

Our achievements have been recognised by the Corporate Covid Comms Awards, who awarded us 'Best Community Initiative' for an organisation who has best adapted a community programme in response to Covid-19.

Community Wellbeing Index

The Community Wellbeing Index is an online tool that provides insight into the wellbeing of over 28,000 communities across the UK. By entering a postcode, the Index allows users to view scores across many different measures - from the quality of education, housing affordability and public transport links, to the amount of green space and the number of community centres in an area - providing a useful snapshot of the strengths and challenges facing that community.

We use the Index to inform our community strategy and activity plan to understand more about our communities. We refresh our data annually and, this year, updated figures highlighted the importance of the three pillars of our community plan. During the peak of the pandemic, we used the data to identify clinically and socially vulnerable communities, supporting the Co-op Coronavirus Members Fund to target funding at communities that need it most.

The Index continues to be used extensively both across the Co-op, and by external stakeholders such as charities, local councils, private sector organisations and researchers. In March we successfully launched the Index at Parliament, providing almost all MPs with data relating to their constituencies.

In November, the Community Wellbeing Index won the Tech for Good award at the [National Technology Awards](#).

Next year we will continue to use the Index to inform our missions; helping to select locations for community fridges, mental wellbeing services and youth programmes for example.



Putting community at the heart of membership

We recognise that we all need to help each other out and our communities need support now more than ever, so we've put community at the heart of the new membership offer.

Our evolved membership offer doubles the difference members can make to communities when they choose Co-op. When members buy selected Co-op branded products and services, they get 2p for every pound spent back for themselves and the same goes to supporting communities.

The funds raised by our members are split two ways:

- Supporting the **Local Community Fund**, helping thousands of grassroots community causes, where members can select which cause in their local community to support.
- Supporting the **Community Partnerships Fund** creating lasting change on big issues we care about - access to food, mental wellbeing support, education and employment for young people - in partnership with like-minded organisations. Targeting communities that need the extra help the most.

Members will also have the opportunity to shape and participate in community activity and campaigns supported by Co-op Member Pioneers and Co-operate, our community platform.

In 2020 members selected over 1 million causes, more causes than ever

(2019: 709,000).

Local Community Fund

The Local Community Fund enables our members to support local projects they care about. Since we launched the fund back in 2016, we've shared over £70m to help causes deliver 21,000 unique community projects across the UK.



From supporting projects that promote mental wellbeing and access to food, to education and employment, our funding has never been more vital

and this was reflected in the Fund receiving the Better Society Award for National Commitment to Communities.

The Local Community Fund is a key driver in helping us achieve our Community Plan. We are currently supporting 4,500 causes in local communities across the UK, helping us deliver our community missions.

Community Partnerships Fund

In September 2020 we introduced our Community Partnerships Fund. The fund has been set up to create lasting change working with partners to target and support the most vulnerable whether that be by geography or by demographic.

The fund enables us to make significant investments in communities on behalf of our members, so we're giving them an opportunity to shape and participate in how the fund is delivered. Members can choose which opportunities to engage with, from suggesting ideas through Join In events to getting involved through the Co-operate platform.

You can read more on how we've been working with our partners, such as the Co-op Foundation, Mind, The Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) and Inspire in this section of the report.



£15m given to over 4,500 local community projects in 2020

Supporting causes during the pandemic

Given the challenges that 2020 presented to our local causes, we changed our Local Community Fund payment process so we could inject extra funds into our April payout, boosting funds from £1.2m to £4.5m.

In May, we issued a survey to causes to understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on projects being supported through the fund.

Over 3,000 causes responded (69% response rate) providing valuable insight into the challenges causes were facing. As a result of these key insights, we allowed greater flexibility in the use of the grant to enable causes to adapt their projects in light of the pandemic.



Fair access to food

Research by the Food Standards Agency found that the poorest among us have been hit hardest by the pandemic, with 1 in 10 people now accessing food banks. The ongoing economic impact of the pandemic means this situation is set to worsen into 2021 and beyond.

We've long been committed to reducing the amount of food we waste and in 2020 our Foodshare programme, which shares surplus food redistribution to local community groups, grew by 80% compared to the previous year. See more on this on page 68. We're now looking at how we can build a more sustainable approach to tackling food poverty with communities. We started to lay the foundations of this during the crisis and now plan to extend our support to go beyond funding and food distribution.

Community solutions such as breakfast clubs, community cafés and allotments already focus on removing the dependency on food banks and putting the power to access food back into the hands of communities. Looking to 2021, our mission will be focused on supporting these types of initiatives to help people get up the food ladder and access food in a more sustainable way.

Tackling food insecurity

At the start of the pandemic, food insecurity became one of the most pressing challenges faced by our communities. Using our existing assets and partnerships, we were able to move swiftly to support in a number of ways, including:

- Supporting FareShare¹ to distribute five million meals through contributions such as member and customer donations, as well as giving our members the opportunity to donate their unspent Co-op member rewards to a new Co-op Coronavirus Members Fund
- Launching a multi-million-pound fund to support food charities across the UK. The campaign raised £1.5 million for the National Emergency Trust (NET) helping to fund local food charities up and down the UK
- Providing over 6,000 Co-op Academy pupils and students eligible for free school meals with Co-op vouchers during national school closures, periods of self isolation and October half term, amounting to over £2.9 million of support.

Underpinning action on the ground, our engagement with the Government this year has focused firmly on influencing more systemic change to address this issue.

We're proud to have been one of the first retailers to confirm our participation in the End Child Food Poverty Taskforce convened by Marcus Rashford. The Taskforce campaigned for the Government to adopt the first three recommendations set out in

Henry Dimbleby's National Food Strategy Interim Report, focusing on:

- Expanding eligibility for the Free School Meal scheme to include every child
- Extending the Holiday Activity and Food Programme to all areas in England so that summer holiday support is available to all children in receipt of Free School Meals
- Increasing the value of Healthy Start vouchers to £4.25 per week.

Working in co-operation with the Taskforce and hundreds of other businesses across the country, we've seen the Government change course significantly over 2020. Additional funding has been committed to local authorities to fund holiday provision and to ensure food banks can continue to serve those most in need. In December 2020, we went one step further and began adding £1 to the value of the Healthy Start vouchers when they are redeemed by our members and customers. And the Healthy Start scheme will increase in value to £4.25 from April 2021.



¹ National charity aimed at relieving food poverty and reducing food waste in the UK.

Fair Access to Mental Wellbeing

1 in 4 of us will experience a mental health problem in any given year.² This year, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental wellbeing of the nation, with 60% of adults and 68% of young people reporting that their mental health has deteriorated³ as a result. Our mental wellbeing work focuses on areas of colleague wellbeing, community mental wellbeing and access to mental wellbeing support.

Colleague Wellbeing

We recognise that to improve community mental wellbeing, we need to start at home and focus on our colleagues. Mental health is one of the biggest drivers of absence from work, so we know we need to support our colleagues who are facing challenges. You can read more on this on page 35.

Community mental wellbeing

We are partnering with [Mind](#), [Scottish Association of Mental Health \(SAMH\)](#) and [Inspire](#) to bring communities together to improve mental wellbeing. We aim to raise £6m to fund new research, services, and advocacy activity to support people to build their resilience and make a lasting change to the mental wellbeing of communities.

Co-op colleagues, members, customers, partners and suppliers are passionate about this and have already raised £3m. As a result we have launched 12 new pilot services across the UK with more services to be rolled out in 2021.

We are also signposting people to mental wellbeing support including information, services and community activity. In 2020 we supported half a million people in this way, for example connecting people through Co-operate, our online community hub, our Member Pioneers, and our funeral business signposting to bereavement support.

Over £3m raised

for Mind, SAMH and Inspire to fund new mental wellbeing services

12 pilots live across the UK

2,102 wellbeing causes supported by the Local Community Fund

Nearly half a million people signposted to sources of mental wellbeing support



Supporting the bereaved during the pandemic

The pandemic has had long-term emotional impacts for grieving families and individuals.

A report we published over the summer showed that in the weeks following the start of the UK's lockdown, 47% of bereaved adults in the UK had been denied their final farewell to a loved one because of Government and local authority restrictions.

We've presented the key findings of the report to the Government and are working with them, bereavement charities, and other key organisations, to help support families through their grief. We've also introduced new ways to help families have a 'delayed celebration of life' for their loved one.

² <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/#References>

³ Mind (2020), The Mental Health Emergency: How has the coronavirus pandemic affected our mental health? June 2020

Fair access to education and employment for young people

The economic impact of the pandemic will be felt for years to come. We want to be able to provide joined up, sustainable solutions that will make a difference to the lives of the next generation. But it's clear from our insight that we can't do this alone. Through sharing capabilities, resources and funding with partners, we can achieve more together. So our aim is that, through co-operation, we will enable young people to change their lives and play an active role in changing the world around them for the better.

Our key focus will be around enabling young people to **be heard**, **make a difference** and **access opportunities**.

Be heard

As part of our work with Damilola Taylor Trust and the Hope 2020 collective, we partnered with the [Rio Ferdinand Foundation](#) to provide the opportunity for 200 young people from our most marginalised and vulnerable communities to take part in a youth voice project. This helped them to develop skills in creative expression and producing online youth voice content.

Make a difference

We worked with NCS ([National Citizen Service](#)) to pilot a co-operative local model in Hendon. By connecting young people in NCS Local Action Groups with our Co-op community assets, they were able to use the Community Wellbeing Index to understand more about their communities, learn how our Co-operate platform could help them to connect with their communities, and access support from their local Member Pioneer.

Access opportunities

During 2020, 65 young people went through our pre-apprenticeship programme, helping them obtain GCSEs in Maths and English; a pre-requisite for the apprenticeship programme. We also worked with Connell Sixth Form College to develop the Co-op Young Business Leaders Programme - a work placement programme for 20 Business Studies BTEC students.

See p39 for more on our Apprenticeship programme.

Launched in 2018, our 'Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities' campaign aims to protect our colleagues and others from violence; tackling the root causes of crime. We believe providing fair access to opportunities for training and employment for young people is a strong enabler of this. You can read more on this campaign on p42.

2021 will see us further develop our work in this area by identifying and onboarding new youth partners to work with us in delivering projects. We will also grow our youth employability offer, opening up 150 Kickstart placements in the communities that need the opportunities most.



Co-op Academies

The Co-op Academies Trust provides an education based on co-operative Values and Principles for over 17,000 young people. It's their ambition to provide fairer access to education as well as to inspire a new generation of high-achieving, ambitious, skilled and confident co-operators.

In line with our mission to provide fairer access to education and employment, we are supporting our academies to deliver their Careers Education, Advice, Information and Guidance (CEAIG) activity, including work experience and opportunities to develop key employability skills. Some sessions were delivered whilst the students were not able to attend college.

As part of our commitment to the Trust, we provide governance expertise from our business, which includes over 80 Co-op governors.

Despite the challenges Covid-19 has presented, we remain committed to developing opportunities for more students to move from a Co-op education into a Co-op apprenticeship and career. We're also proud of how our Co-op values and approach have been a positive support for pupils and staff during this challenging period.

We're proud that, by the end of 2020, Co-op Academies Trust ran 26 academy schools (2019: 24) in Greater Manchester, Yorkshire, Merseyside and North Staffordshire. The Trust has also been selected to open two new academies, in 2021 and 2022 in Manchester and Leeds respectively.

26 academy schools in the Co-op Academies Trust (2019: 24)



Watch how else we are helping our communities here

Helping Communities to Co-operate across the UK

Member Pioneers

Member Pioneers make great things happen in our communities. They are the boots on the ground, working together with our Co-operate platform, other Co-op colleagues, members and local causes to make a difference and make our communities better places to work, play, live and learn.

In 2020, we focused on building our network and now have Member Pioneers in place across the UK. This meant that during the pandemic, Member Pioneers were at the forefront of our community response supporting those who are vulnerable, finding volunteers and keeping people connected.

1,000 Member Pioneers & Member Pioneer Coordinators

based in communities across the UK

89,000 hours invested

in UK communities in 2020 including...

...more than 30,000 hours supporting Community Coronavirus Response

Member Pioneers engage an average of 30,000 people a month

As well as encouraging member activity and engagement, they bring our community plan to life focusing on our 3 missions which will continue into 2021. For more information, or to get involved, visit www.communityspirit.co.uk

Co-operate Platform

We want to amplify the good things happening in local communities, making it easier to connect with others and get stuff done. Launched in 2019, Co-operate is our online platform that pulls together local events and activities to create one place for people to go to make things happen in their local community.

Last year, we committed to driving impact and engagement for national Co-op campaigns, while continuing geographical roll out to more communities across the UK. At the start of the pandemic, we worked swiftly to move the platform from 9 communities across Trafford and Leeds to a national presence so we could provide ways for people to connect virtually in their communities. We also supported campaigns such as **Mental Health Awareness Day**, supported the vulnerable customer shopping scheme and connected people locally through the [Hold Still](#) campaign.

Moving into 2021, we'll continue to focus on organisers and how we can support them in getting behind our 3 community missions, kicking off with access to food.

Colleague support for communities

We encourage all colleagues to play an active role in the community, whether volunteering through the Co-operate Platform, running or participating in community projects, or taking part in social action.

In 2020, colleagues supported their communities in a variety of ways, from volunteering with local charities, organising fundraising events and serving as trustees or governors, to supporting causes participating in the Local Community Fund. For more examples of our activity, see our Co-op blogs page [here](#).

In 2020 we worked with a small number of stores to better understand how we can support colleagues to really make a difference locally.

We found that supporting colleagues to be more active in their communities resulted in colleagues feeling like they were more connected to their community and with our Vision of Co-operating for a Fairer World. We also saw positive outcomes in terms of colleague wellbeing and confidence. We plan to extend this learning in 2021.



Over 183,000 visits to Co-operate

The Co-op Foundation

The Co-op Foundation is our charity. It helps people challenge inequality and co-operate for change so they can share a fairer future. In 2020, the Foundation responded to the pandemic by committing to being as flexible as possible for its UK-wide network of partners, enabling them to adapt their work to the changing needs of their communities. It also built on its £6.5m of grants tackling youth loneliness by launching phase two of its Lonely Not Alone campaign, made by young people to beat the stigma of youth loneliness.

The Foundation awarded almost £1.8m in grants in 2020 to help young people make spaces better for their peers and support each other through bereavement and during the move from primary to secondary school. In 2021, The Foundation will continue to work alongside the Co-op to support young people and communities to tackle inequality and build a fairer future. See [here](#) for more detail.

Awarded £1.8m

to 42 community organisations that support young people to help their peers

Committed to investing more than £380,000

in helping community spaces UK-wide to become more financially sustainable

Engaged 57 young people

to create year two of Lonely Not Alone

Spaces

Towards the end of 2019, we identified the protection and creation of community spaces as one of the core pillars of our Co-operate 2022 community strategy. Although this is no longer a central element of our strategy, we continued to champion community spaces throughout 2020.

The pandemic has acted as a catalyst in exposing just how important public spaces are to community wellbeing. As the ability to leave our homes to visit our local park was restricted, appreciation for vital and under threat community spaces increased. In 2019, we commissioned research with three charity partners on the most effective ways to empower communities to reverse the impact of lost community spaces.

In March, we published '[In Community Hands](#)' with our partners Locality. It set out clear recommendations to Government which, if adopted, would empower more communities to benefit from Community Asset Transfer. We hosted a parliamentary roundtable with contributions from Members of Parliament, Local Authorities, and community groups.

In May, we supported Fields in Trust with the launch of their [Green Space Index](#), publishing insight for the first time into how population change is likely to impact on the provision of parks and green spaces over time. In July, with the Plunkett Foundation, we published '[Ripple Effect](#)'.

Originally commissioned to provide an Impact Statement on the benefits that community businesses provide in rural communities, the report included inspirational examples of communities coming together in local spaces to launch vital services in response to the pandemic.

The Co-op Foundation also continued its support for community spaces in 2020 by committing to invest more than £380,000 in interest-free loans and grants, and agreeing 16 repayment breaks to help partners funded through our loans programme survive through lockdown.





🎯 2021 targets

By 2022, we will signpost over a million people to mental wellbeing support including information, services and community activity.

By 2022, we will support 10,000 people to improve their resilience and mental wellbeing through our charity partnership services.

We will provide a network of 100 community fridges in places of most need in 2021 that will support 187,500 people with 5m meals annually by end of 2022.

By 2022, our Youth Mission will enable young people to be heard, make a difference and access opportunities. Delivered through:

- A peer research and social action initiative in partnership with Youth Endowment Fund. Giving 6,400 young people the platform, skills and support to be heard and make a difference on the issues that matter to them.
- Supporting 150 young people (16-25) from disadvantaged communities to access work through the Kickstart scheme. We will also offer at least 50% of those meaningful employment after their Kickstart scheme has finished (after 6 months).

We will encourage 300,000 people to engage with their local community through our Co-operate platform by the end of 2021.

We will generate at least £24m of funding for our Local Community Fund and Community Partnerships Fund in 2021 to support fairer access to food, mental wellbeing services and opportunities for young people.

In 2021 we will invest 113,000 hours for Member Pioneers to engage with people to increase co-operation in our communities.

We will increase the number of Academies in the Co-op Academies Trust to at least 40 by the end of the academic year 2021-22.

To ensure our Academies are governed in line with co-operative values and principles, we will provide a current or former colleague as Chair of Governors and an additional 1 - 4 Co-op Governors per Academy, depending on the needs of the Academy.