

January Council Newsletter



The National Members' Council was back together in Manchester on 26 January for our first meeting of 2019. It was a great start to a year that promises lots of exciting things ahead from around the Co-op.

Before we said hello to 2019 though, it was important to say a fond farewell to a real champion of Council, Gill Gardner. Gill took on the role of Council Secretary when the Members' Council formed in 2015 and has recently moved onto pastures new within the Co-op's Legal business - we wish her all the best for the future and are incredibly proud of all that she achieved with us.

From one president to another, I'd also like to take this opportunity to congratulate one of our Independent Society Members, Steve Hughes, on his election to President of the Lincolnshire Co-operative Society. Well done and good luck in your new role.

This update provides an overview of the highlights and key topics we covered over the weekend. Please share it with your networks and contacts within the Society. We welcome any comments and feedback, which you can send on to council@coop.co.uk.

Update from the Food team

Starting our meeting with an update from our industry-leading Food colleagues helped to set the tone for an insightful day. Led by Jo Whitfield, Chief Executive of Food, the team gathered to give us a wider understanding of what's been happening and what's to come for our Food business.

Jo introduced the team and their update by sharing that their focus will continue to be on winning in convenience by being closer to what customers and members need, where they are, and what they care about. Jo took the time to thank everyone in Food for an incredible 2018 and all their hard work but stressed that there's so much more to be done.



Following a packed highlight reel of a year's worth of progress and achievements, we launched straight into plans for 2019. Bolstered by a strong summer, fast growth and lots of investment for the future in communities, logistics, stores and colleagues, Jo emphasised that our strong trading and market-leading position will help us to face challenges around cost, inflation, competition and uncertainty as we continue to build in scale.

Throughout the year, we'll be extending our reach to bring us into more communities, supported by our fantastic Nisa partnership and an exploration of franchising. Delivery opportunities and trialling new technologies are also an area of focus and development, as we look into long-term considerations for what people want and need and where we can learn from others. A recent and exciting example of this has been our [new partnership with Starship Technologies](#), which saw some of our Food stores using robots to deliver groceries locally.

A big success story so far, I particularly enjoyed hearing about how we put our own Co-op Difference touch on the trial over Christmas by transforming the robots into reindeers; local children then sent their lists for Santa into stores and our colleagues/elves replied with their next delivery - looking forward to seeing where this promising venture goes next and how it makes a difference to our communities and their Co-op experience.

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After Jo, we then heard from Nisa Chief Executive, Ken Towle, who joined the business as our partnership began. Ken shared that things have been incredibly smooth so far and, already, we're seeing the benefits working together can bring. Offering the Co-op range in 900 Nisa stores has been an early success and we'll now be extending this to 2,000 stores around the UK, which will be a huge benefit to our ambition for being closer to where our customers and members are.

In 2019, Ken updated that the focus for our partnership will be on developing our recruitment and training offer, working with franchisees and continuing to build a platform that makes the most of our combined strengths.

Next up we heard from our Director of Trading, Matt Hood, who shared that 2019 will be all about showcasing the quality of our products, helping communities to be healthier and responding to growing trends, keeping prices fair and promotions compelling, and making it easier for customers to get what they want in our stores – supported by great retail basics and our ambition to win at convenience.

As ethics and values have always been central for us, our work will continue to make a difference and demonstrate that we care about doing better business. Through our [Future of Food 2030 plan](#) and our ongoing Fairtrade commitment, we'll be pushing to build strong, fair and collaborative relationships with our suppliers so that we can be their best customers and in turn, even better for ours.

To round-up our bumper and well-received update from Food, Chris Whitfield, our Retail and Logistics Director, spoke about how we will be improving on our transformation portfolio to support our convenience ambition. Starting with a [new depot to help us with trade](#), we'll also be using more sophisticated tools to tailor our ranges and will become more efficient across our network by simplifying processes for colleagues.

Our next major campaign was also recently approved by Council and will focus on making our [colleagues and our communities safer against violent crime](#), which will be a key piece of work for Chris and the business in 2019. Council recently led on an opportunity for members to have their say on how the Co-op can help to make their communities safer places to live and work. With their feedback, we'll be able to shape our campaign and the wider work we do on what matters most to the people and places our businesses serve.

As you can see, Food has gained a lot of momentum throughout 2018 to help build a solid foundation for 2019 and I can't wait to see what the next 12 months holds.

Co-op Compass refresh with Sarah Horne

[The Co-op Compass](#) was created to provide a framework for Council to effectively hold the Board to account and act as guardians for the co-operative values and principles, using four key themes to measure performance.

As Council and the needs of members and the business have evolved since the compass was implemented in 2016, we're now in a position to refresh our key performance indicators (KPIs) to better reflect current priorities. As approved at our January meeting, the Co-op Compass will now have new KPIs under three of its themes/lenses; these will reflect positive feeling for the Co-op brand, policies and practices, commitment to openness and honesty, perception and campaigns within ethical leadership, and incidents of violent crime.



Member Voice and Participation update with Mark Robinson-Field

Mark has been a strong support for Council in engaging with members and gaining their views, so it was great to hear from him on what his team have been working on recently.

Co-op Join in is all about giving members the opportunity to have an active role in the Co-op, and Mark shared that they've learnt a lot about what makes members tick and want to get involved. In 2018, the team held 193 opportunities that engaged 124,000 members, with 95% of them saying it enhances their membership.

This is brilliant news for the Council and our use of Join in as a channel for reaching out to Co-op Members and gathering their thoughts. In 2019, we'll be working closely with Mark and his team to support our Join in Live events and ask members about how they learn as part of our co-operative education research, plus establishing any other opportunities for linking in with them this way.

Mark also introduced us to our new and improved Co-op Young Members' Group. Now made up of six young people from around the UK, the group aims to use their existing youth networks to encourage more young people to get involved with the Co-op. Already, they've got some really exciting projects lined up and I can't wait to meet with them and find out more.

Directors' Forum: Insurance edition

In light of the recent sale of our Insurance underwriting business, our usual Directors' Forum focused on a Q&A with Mark Summerfield, Chief Executive Officer for CIS General Insurance Limited, giving us the opportunity to raise any issues and concerns.

For us, it was really important to make sure that the deal protects colleagues and their jobs, continues to give Co-op Members access to products and our benefits, and ensures good value for money.

Thank you to Mark for coming along at such short notice, it was a very useful and insightful session.



Updates from our committee chairs

It was great to hear from our committee chairs about all the work our committees have been doing in their areas to support Council in effectively holding the Board to account, acting as guardians of co-operative values and principles, and representing members. Lots of collaboration and co-operation has been going on in the background to make sure we're fulfilling our roles to the best of our abilities.



Friday Night Programme - in conversation with Brad Hill

Council were delighted to welcome the Co-op's former Head of Fairtrade, Brad Hill, back to 1 Angel Square for a chat about his career and legacy that spanned over 20 years and championed the Co-op's commitment to Fairtrade. Following Brad's informative and inspiring presentation, we gave a nod to our Scottish Council Members with a Burns' Night themed buffet. I hope everyone enjoyed the evening, it was great to get everyone together and learn more about our Co-op. Wishing Brad all the best for his retirement - it's well deserved!



Nick Crofts
President of the Members' Council



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