Hello from Nick

The National Members’ Council was back together in Manchester on 1 February for our first meeting of 2020.

As well as welcoming in the New Year, we also welcomed Marie Archer to her first meeting as a Council Member for our Scotland constituency. I wish her all the best in her role and it’s great to have her with us.

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 our Society and your own. We welcome any comments and feedback, which you can send on to council@coop.co.uk.

Co-op’s vision, choices and plans with Sir Chris Kelly, Pippa Wicks and Shirine Khoury-Haq

In November, I shared the latest update with you around ‘What’s next?’ for Co-op and how our Board, Executive and Council are working together to shape a vision for the future that delivers a real difference through co-operation. Working with our Strategy team, we helped to prioritise the areas we felt would help us best achieve our objectives for the future and at our February Council Meeting, we heard from some of our Board and Executive colleagues on where they’ve got to since we last met.

Introducing the session, Sir Chris Kelly thanked our Members’ Council for their guidance throughout the process and set the scene for Deputy Chief Executive, Pippa Wicks, and Chief Finance Officer, Shirine Khoury-Haq, to share the meaning behind our new vision and talk us through the next five years for our businesses.

To help us make a real difference with what we do, our vision is all about ‘Co-operating for a fairer world’ and empowering action amongst our members, communities and colleagues. Pippa shared that our time has come again because there’s so much relevance for what we do but we need to accelerate bringing our plans to life. To do this, Shirine explained that over the next five years, we’ll be reshaping our plans for a more sustainable Co-op.

While some difficult choices have had to be made along the way as we determine what we can do, what we should do and what we can afford to do, I’m very excited about our Co-op’s future and the difference we’ll be able to make to so many lives.
Community update with Rebecca Birkbeck and Russell Gill

Following our vision session, we were joined by Rebecca, Community & Shared Value Director, and Russell, Head of Co-op & Local Engagement, from our Communities team, who updated us on the latest work they’re doing as part of Co-operate 2022. Co-operate 2022 is our plan for supporting the communities we serve around three key themes that members told us matter most to them: community spaces, wellbeing and education and skills.

Rebecca started the update with a big thank you to our joint working group, who have dedicated a lot of time and support to shaping plans and making sure our communities are getting the help they need. From here, Rebecca then shared that the team now feel like they’re in a good place, with a strong foundation for addressing inequalities in our communities. With our three key themes at the core, we’ve now aligned our Local Community Fund to them and the Co-op Foundation has been busy securing funding for projects working in these areas. Rebecca was also excited to announce our latest charity partnership with Keep Britain Tidy’s Great British Spring Clean campaign, which we’ll be supporting in addition to our fundraising work with MIND, SAMH and Inspire.

While our three key themes form the core of Co-operate 2022, our Member Pioneers are the ones who will be bringing our plans to life at the heart of our communities. It was great to hear from Russell, who shared that his team will be focusing on recruiting more Member Pioneers and working with them to make sure that they feel supported and can flourish with Co-op. He also let us know that we’ll be connecting with even more people around the UK by creating new member participation opportunities and building digital communities too.

As you can imagine, co-operation is very important to me and our Council Members, as it’s what our Co-op was founded on. We’re really proud of all the work our Communities team is doing and I can’t wait to see how working together over the next few years will change communities around the UK for the better.

Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities with Paul Gerrard

Members’ Council favourite, Director of Public Affairs and Campaigns, Paul Gerrard, was back with us this time to share an update on our Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities work. A year after Council Members unanimously voted for it to be Co-op’s next big campaign, Paul shared that we’ve been taking operational, campaigning and community action to address the root causes of crime in our stores. As part of this, we’re spending four times more on security than the average retailer, trialling and rolling out body cameras and gathering thought leadership for the first study in this area. Despite 700 colleagues bravely sharing their stories with the Home Office last summer, retail crime still isn’t a priority for the government at present because the resources and powers needed for the police simply aren’t there. To help where we can, we’re lobbying with politicians and have given £5.5m to more than 1800 causes who are tackling the causes of crime.

Joining Paul was PC Stuart Toogood from West Midlands Police, who run the Offending to Rehab and Recovery programme. An amazing and inspirational tool to help thieves and offenders stop once and for all, the programme helps to treat the addictions of prolific shoplifters. We heard some incredible stories from the programme, including two about offenders who were sponsored by Central England Co-op, before welcoming Caroline, a former shoplifter, to our meeting. Caroline bravely told us about her experience with committing retail crime as she battled a drug addiction and struggled to make ends meet for her family. After losing her brother and living with the guilt of what she was doing, Caroline vowed to get clean and with the support of Stuart and his colleagues, she was proud to say that she hasn’t touched drugs or alcohol in a year. Through the programme, Caroline’s also been volunteering at a charity for domestic abuse victims and is now looking to take on full-time, paid work with Stuart and the team.

One of the most powerful presentations I’ve ever heard, there wasn’t a dry eye in the house when Caroline, Stuart and Paul left the stage. Safer Colleagues, Safer
Directors’ Forum

It’s always great to open up the floor at Council meetings for questions to some of our directors. Some of our Committee Council Members also fed in questions from Co-op Members as part of a recent Join in opportunity, which was a great way to get them involved at the heart of our business.

From our Board of Directors, we were joined by Hazel Blears, Stevie Spring, Lord Victor Adebowale and Margaret Casely-Hayford.

Questions asked were on the topics of: member participation, Fairtrade, diversity, colleague harassment, equal pay claims and Co-op Health.

Friday Night Live: Fairtrade with Co-op’s Food Policy team

Every Friday night before a Council meeting, we host an event called Friday Night Live. This time, we were joined by Co-op’s Food Policy team to hear about their latest work around Fairtrade, talk about the challenges suppliers face and learn how we can support Fairtrade Fortnight. Council Members are big advocates of Fairtrade and so proud of how Co-op has championed it, so it was great to boost our knowledge and understand how we can better support such an important movement.

Communities and standing up against the violence and abuse that our colleagues face daily is a priority for all of us; a big shout-out to Central England Co-op for their work in tackling retail crime locally. In 2020, we’ll be continuing to carry out research and will begin to campaign in stores, but it’s crucial that the government recognises retail crime, and the causes of it, as a growing issue. We all wrote letters to our MPs, asking for a response to evidence, and I’d urge you to do the same. Abuse and violence is not part of the job for retail workers and it’s time we put a stop to it for our colleagues and our communities.

Team #CoopNMC are saying ‘Kiss My Ass Cancer’ at the 2020 Manchester Marathon

Unfortunately, there’s not many people who can say their lives haven’t been affected by cancer. Five of our Council Members - Bev Perkins, Kat Rose, Zoe Selby, Tanya Noon and Scott Allen (coach) - have joined forces to create a relay team for the 2020 Manchester Marathon and raise money to support the Royal Marsden Cancer Charity in saying ‘Kiss My Ass Cancer’. The team have a goal of £1,000 set but it would be amazing if we could get them beyond that. If you’d like to know more about their story and donate, please visit the team’s Just Giving page.

Nick Crofts
President of the Members’ Council

Keep up to date with us using #CoopNMC on twitter