

# **Minutes of Co-operatives East Annual General Meeting**

**22 September 2015 10.30am - 2pm**

## **Anglia Farmers**

Honingham Thorpe, Colton, Norwich, Norfolk NR9 5BZ

### **Present:**

Sally Kelly	(Chair) The Guild
Sally Chicken	East of England Co-operative
Austen Cordasco	CAN
Joe Gluza	Individual member
Chris Herries	Individual member
Claire Johnsen	East of England Co-operative
Sarah Kirkpatrick	(Secretariat) Individual member
Mark Merrywest	CSNet
Peter Shaman	Willow Housing Co-operative
David Strode-Willis	Individual Member
Pam Walker	First Question Co-operative
Clarke Willis	Anglia Farmers

### **1 Welcome and introductions**

The Chair warmly welcomed all present and introductions were made. Thanks were given to Anglia Farmers for very kindly hosting the meeting at their premises.

### **2 Apologies for absence**

The following apologies for absence had been received:

Andy Syrett - (Treasurer) Individual member, Tracy Markwell - Leading Lives, Ivan Ivanovitch - Individual member, Richard Robertson - Woodcraft Folk, Paul Cranfield - Co-operative Group, Malcolm Wallace - Chelmsford Co-operative Party, Karen Ball - Central England Co-operative, Alison Davies - Essex Savers net Credit Union Ltd, Simon Gilhooly - Green Energy Nayland, Helen Underwood - Foster Care Co-operative, Robert Jones, Brian Walker, Minnie Moll - East of England Co-operative Society, Robin Cherney - Herts and Beds Co-operative Party

### **3 Minutes of the AGM held on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2014**

The Chair noted that the previous year's AGM and Members' Meeting had been a very well attended and productive meeting that helped inform the work of Co-operatives East.

The minutes of the AGM held on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2014 were agreed as a true record.

The minutes were proposed as a true record by Pam Walker and seconded by Peter Shaman.

#### 4 Matters arising from minutes of the AGM held on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Item 7 Finance Report – an action had been agreed at the 2014 AGM to consider investing the organisation's reserves in an interest bearing account. The Chair reported that appropriate accounts had been investigated by the Treasurer and an account proposed. Unfortunately this particular account was withdrawn before an account could be opened and no other worthwhile option had been found for a small sum with a requirement for easy access.

The Chair gave thanks to those that had been involved in taking actions forward since the last AGM including members of a Task and Finish Group.

There were no further matters arising from the minutes of the AGM held on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2014.

#### 5 Annual Report

The Chair referred those present to a printed Annual Report for the year to 31 March 2015.

She stated that the year had been an active one with a particular increase in interest from individual co-operators, many of whom had become members. The main activities or points of note were:

- The Committee had, despite significant decreases in income, made a commitment to investing around £5000 of its small reserve in activity to raise the profile of Cooperatives East and co-operatives in the region and it was felt that, considering our limited resources, we achieved this.
- **Membership** - In the year Co-operatives East had twelve new members, of which two were corporate members and ten individuals. In the same period one corporate member ceased to operate bringing the total number of members to fifty nine. The increase in membership was very welcome and, in particular, the interest from individuals who have wanted to join us.
- **Events and promotions**
  - During the year new promotional materials were developed. The materials were given a new, modern design and included a pull-up banner, table banners, a flyer and a new membership form. These were well received. The website and social media presence were also developed. Monthly e-newsletters continued to be sent to members and some other interested persons. A comment was made that these were useful.
  - For Co-operatives Fortnight 2014, Co-operatives East worked in collaboration with the East of England Co-operative to promote 'Co-op Picnics'. The East of England Co-operative very generously developed an online 'pack' to support people to run their own picnic and sponsored some of the costs of the activities. Cooperatives East, in partnership with First Question, ran its own picnic at The Common Room in Norwich over the weekend of 5th/6th July with cooperative stalls, art activities, a film showing, a discussion on housing and worker cooperatives led by Radical Routes/Catalyst Collective and free refreshments. Over 450 people were thought to have attended and it was a useful opportunity to chat with people.
  - On the evening of 5th July 2014 a gathering called 'Re-imagining Education', a TedX style discussion, was very well attended and has led to an ongoing 'Reimagining Education' group and a Facebook page.
  - Co-operatives East had a stand at the Burston Rally in September 2014
  - Two members of the Committee attended the UK Society for Co-operative Studies Conference 2014 in Chelmsford.

- Four Committee Meetings, to which all members were invited, and an Annual General Meeting were held during the year. The meetings were generally very well attended including by a number of our new members. The Annual General Meeting was particularly well supported and the open discussions about the future priorities for Cooperatives East informed the development of future plans.
- With an exciting year behind us and increasing interest in co-operative working we have real expectations that we can grow and develop our organisation and activities into the future.

The Chair also thanked all those people who have been involved in a number of co-operative activities in the year and the recent summer.

A question was asked by Sally Chicken wanting to know if a co-operative that is a membership of Co-operatives UK in the eastern region is automatically a member of Co-operatives East. It was stated that this was not the case but that there had been an agreement for Co-operatives UK to inform the Regional Co-operative Councils (RCCs) as to any new member co-operatives from their region to allow them to contact them to offer membership of the RCC. Co-operatives East had, however, never been provided with such information from Co-operatives UK. It was also confirmed that any member of Co-operatives East is a 'lifelong' member until they choose to leave, there being no current membership fee necessitating a membership renewal.

A suggestion of a voluntary membership subscription, rather than a request for a donation, be made to members to bring in an income.

Austen Cordasco asked if people are aware of 'Co-operative Ways Forward', a proposal put together by Jo Bird to build an organisation of individual co-operators to assist in developing the co-operative movement. They had sought to gain investment through crowdfunding but failed to achieve the minimum investment level. The Chair responded to say that we were aware of the initiative and that she had contacted the proposers to suggest that the link was made with RCCs such as Co-operatives East that already engage individual co-operators at a local level.

A question was asked by Claire Johnsen on whether or not Co-operatives East should change its logo to match the new Co-operatives UK logo. The response was that Co-operatives UK has informed RCCs that it the RCC's choice as to whether it keeps the old logo or adopts the new one. As Co-operatives East has recently had a range of promotional materials designed it was felt that the old logo should be retained at least for the foreseeable future.

Pam Walker commented that she thought that the monthly e-newsletters were very good and should be continued.

## **6 Finance Report**

The Chair informed the meeting that the Treasurer had been unable to attend the meeting. He had provided a summary of the Financial Statement as well as the full Statement and a breakdown of the areas of expenditure to assist in answering any questions that might arise. These were handed round to those at the meeting. The Treasurer had also provided a Treasurer's Report that was read out to the meeting as follows:

Grants totalling £5,000 were received from The Co-operative Enterprise Hub, East of England Co-operative Society and Co-operatives UK to cover the operational costs of our organisation. Our thanks go to these organisations for their support.

All funds received were utilised for purposes in line with our objectives and within the total budget set and agreed at general members' meetings.

The main expenditure covered administration costs including the organisation of events such as Co-operative Picnics and attendance at the Burston Rally and members meetings together with general secretariat duties.

The financial outcome for the year was a deficit of £4,424 which was covered by our reserves which, as at the year end, now stand at £13,370. As we are aware that the level of grant income will be reduced further in the coming year our reserves provide a good level of comfort that we can continue to fulfil our objectives.

The meeting was referred to the summary Financial Statement. The Chair stated that during the year £4,424 of reserves had been spent out of a previously agreed budget of £5,000. Comment was made on the cost of administration, in particular under the heading of the Co-op Picnics, which had been incurred due to the level of activity during the year and had been agreed by the Committee. Part of the cost had been offset by a donation of £1000 from the East of England Co-operative Society. A question was also asked about who the organisation's creditors were. This question could not be answered at the meeting but this information would be gained from the Treasurer.

A discussion followed on the need to secure sources of income for the future including the possibility of charging membership fees or inviting donations and charging for services or activities. The Chair stated that Richard Bickle from the Central England Co-operative Society had informed her that a donation £2000 would be provided to Co-operatives East as the sum already given to Co-operatives East Midlands and West Midlands in their trading area. He also suggested that a sum of £4000 might be offered to Co-operatives East in the future following the agreement of a Service Level Agreement.

**ACTION:** The Chair stated that the Committee would specifically look at how to secure an income into the future.

The meeting stated that it welcomed the summary Statement and breakdown of expenditure although the headings were felt to be confusing for some. The Financial Statements were proposed as being formally approved by Joe Gluza, seconded by Pam Walker and agreed by all those at the meeting.

## **7 Election of Management Committee**

The Secretariat advised the meeting that each year one third of the Committee Members are up for re-election at the AGM or may stand down. This year two of the Committee Members from this one third have resigned their Committee positions and their membership. One of these is Andy Syrett, the Treasurer, who due to personal circumstances is no longer able to continue in this position and wishes to stand down as a member. The other is Paul Cranfield who was the Vice Chair and a founder member of the organisation. Paul worked as a member in his capacity as representative of the Co-operative Group but his whole team is being made redundant from the Group very shortly and so he is no longer able to remain as a Committee Member or member. In addition Sally Kelly is standing for re-election this year.

Pam Walker asked that the Committee and membership offer special thanks to both Andy and Paul for their outstanding contributions and commitment to Co-operatives East. They will both be greatly missed.

ACTION: it was agreed that emails and cards would be sent to Andy and Paul expressing Co-operatives East's thanks and wishing them well for the future.

The re-election of Sally Kelly was proposed by Pam Walker, seconded by Pete Shaman and unanimously agreed by the meeting.

The Secretariat informed the meeting that with Andy and Paul's resignations there are places for an additional three Committee Members and if anyone is interested in becoming a Committee Member they can let the Committee know for potential co-option.

The Chair stated that the Committee would arrange a meeting in the near future to agree the new Committee positions.

## **8 Any other business**

There being no other business the Annual General Meeting closed at 12.15 pm.

## **Anglia Farmers**

Following the formal AGM meeting presentations were given by Clarke Willis on Anglia Farmers and the agricultural co-operative sector and by Louis Clabburn, General Manager of AF Affinity. Attendees were also given guided tours of Anglia Farmers' offices.