



Monday 20 April 2026

Dear Janet,

We hope this letter finds you well.

We write to you in the spirit of the long tradition of dialogue between independent co-operative societies – one that has always been built on mutual respect, shared values and a belief that our movement is stronger when we stay close to one another.

We have noted with interest that your Society is currently consulting its members on a proposed transfer of engagements to Co-operative Group and we wanted to reach out at what we recognise is a significant moment for Southern Co-operative and its members.

As you will know, OurCoop was formed in January this year through the coming together of Central Co-op, The Midcounties Co-operative and Chelmsford Star Co-operative Society, preserving centuries of shared heritage. What brought us together, and what guides us now, is a conviction that the independent co-operative sector within the co-operative movement has something distinct and valuable to offer our members, our colleagues and the communities we serve.

Our Board has valued the ways our Societies have worked together in recent years, particularly your Society's leadership in the creation of Independent Co-operative Services Limited. Collectively, we have saved c.£29m in costs as part of our shared procurement activity, with £3.5m in savings for your Society.

This is a wonderful example of how independent societies can reduce costs and return more value to members.

We have also long admired Southern's deep commitment to member and community engagement, which is something we recognise and share. We believe there is real potential for our Societies to build on our existing relationship – on membership, on campaigning, on community programmes – in ways that would benefit the members of both our Societies and the communities we serve alongside one another.

More broadly, we would warmly welcome continued dialogue between our Societies about the future of the co-operative movement. Our own recent experience of coming together has given us learnings we would be very glad to share and we believe there is real value in independent Societies staying in close contact with one another, particularly at moments like this. Our door is always open to you, please do feel able to be in touch at any point, in whatever way would be most helpful.



Central England Co-operative Limited,  
Central House, Queen Street, Lichfield, WS13 6QD

Registered number: 10143R | VAT Number: 508 037 563

We would ask that you share this letter with your Board ahead of your Special General Meeting on 6 May.

With warm regards and in co-operation,



Elaine Dean, OurCoop Society President



Debbie Robinson, OurCoop CEO



Dear Debbie and Elaine

23 April 2026

Thank you for your letter. The Board, and we, appreciate the sentiments shared and are grateful for these at such a challenging time.

We have been meeting weekly for the past four months to address serious financial difficulties facing the Society which came to light at the end of last year. The proposal to merge with the Co-operative Group has been made out of financial necessity. As set out in the communication issued to our members this week, the scale and immediacy of that need led the Board to recommend the proposal for the Transfer of Engagements with the Co-operative Group.

Over the past four months the Board undertook extensive contingency planning and considered whether support of the necessary scale and liquidity (which between now and the end of June is £40-50m) could be realistically available elsewhere. Having done so, the Board concluded that it was not.

The Board recognises the savings achieved through shared procurement and the value of our collaboration to date. We have worked hard to develop a proposal that retains our food volume within the buying group and preserves procurement scale for the benefit of other ISMs. We hope you will recognise that the proposal currently before members provides longer-term security for the Co-operative buying arrangement as a whole.

We are deeply conscious of the importance of independent societies and proud of Southern's heritage, just as you are of yours. We want to confirm that this decision has not been easy for the Board or Management and has only been taken after exhausting all viable alternatives made available to us. While difficult, the Board believes it is the right decision and the one with the best chance of securing those outcomes.

Yours sincerely

Janet Paraskeva

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Stimson".

Janet Paraskeva (Chair) and Ben Stimson (CEO)