

# Independent Social Responsibility review for Midcounties Co-operative

---

## Lead Organisation:

Sustainability West Midlands

Project Managers: Anna Bright (Chief Executive) / Simon Slater (Director of Policy and Partnerships)

## Partners:

## The Midcounties Co-operative

## Project Duration:

2011 - Present



## The Project

Since 2011 Sustainability West Midlands (SWM) has acted as an independent critical friend to the Midcounties Co-operative providing an annual review of their Social Responsibility Report, highlighting areas of good practice and challenging them to be the best in class when it comes to sustainable co-operatives.

We also support their Environmental Steering Group sharing good practice from other organisations and ensuring environmental targets are challenging, and that the organisation addresses future challenges such as the impact of more extremes weather events as a result of climate change, and the impacts that changing population demographics will have on their business.

## Aims

The project aim, as an independent critical friend, was to review the Midcounties Co-operative's Social Responsibility Report in terms of resilience and sustainability. Each year, the review covers the key environmental, economic and social uncertainties faced by the business and local communities, and focuses on sustainability priorities where working together will deliver the best future in terms of jobs, carbon reduction, and healthy lives.

## Challenges

The Midcounties Co-operative is a multi-business organisation including food retail, travel, healthcare, funeral and childcare. Each of these businesses has distinct sustainability challenges and differing priorities. To ensure that all businesses are engaged in relation to sustainability and social responsibility, representatives from each business sit on the Environmental Steering Group, driving activities and projects in this area. SWM sit on the Environmental Steering Group as an independent expert providing advice, sharing good practice, and challenging ideas.

As a co-operative Midcounties are owned by their members who are able to request grants and community support in their area. It is essential that these members are well informed regarding social responsibility and can see the impact of activities in the area. This is the reason for the annual Social Responsibility Report produced by the Society. Having an independent review of the Report by SWM adds credibility.

## The Outcome

### Results

Our review in 2016 indicated that the Midcounties Co-operative is continuing to make good progress in building a resilient business that is contributing to a sustainable future where it operates. Highlights for this year include:

- Sector leadership – Midcounties Co-operative has continued to demonstrate leadership evidenced by:
  - Award of the Queen’s Award for Enterprise for Sustainable Development in 2015
  - Recognition of their progress on energy efficiency and waste management through the achievement of the Carbon Trust Standard
  - Recertification for the second time with the Fair Tax Mark in early 2016
  - Their increasing star rating in the Business in the Community Corporate Responsibility Index
  
- Internal leadership - The Environmental Steering Group was established over eight years ago and continues to help deliver green objectives and embed the culture of sustainability across the Society through awareness raising, communication, and operational activity.
  
- Growth of support for the community with 24,000 products being donated to foodbanks in 2015, up from 10,000 in 2014.
  
- Delivering clear environmental and financial results – Energy and waste reduction programmes are delivering cost savings of £1.5 million per annum, which are probably under reporting the wider environmental and community benefits, such as greenhouse gas reduction beyond CO<sub>2</sub>.
  
- Support for community energy – Midcounties continue to increase the power sourced from community generation initiatives and independent generators acting as a catalyst for change, and lobby for good with partners to open up the energy market to more local and low carbon providers.



## In the Future

Future challenges remain for the business including:

- Reporting on internal progress in improving the business resilience to extreme weather events
- Reporting on the health contribution from reduced fat, sugar, and salt within product lines
- Recognising and preparing for the changing demands from its customers, members, and staff as demographic change occurs within different parts of the Midcounties operating area
- Demonstrating how the business is planning over a longer period, such as 10 year targets with annual milestones in certain areas
- Integration of the Social Responsibility Report to the main annual accounts and goals



SWM will continue to support the Midcounties Co-operative to address these challenges and make a greater contribution to sustainability and environmental protection.

## The Extra's

### Awards and endorsements

In recognition of their social responsibility programme, Midcounties achieved the prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise for Sustainable Development in 2015, as well as being awarded 5 stars (the highest possible score) in Business in the Community's Corporate Responsibility Index.

*"Over the past five years SWM has provided invaluable independent expertise and supported the Society in our work towards being more sustainable and helping to build strong local communities. SWM is able to bring their in-depth awareness of good practice to our Environmental Steering Group. They encourage us to build on our achievements and showcase them, but also challenge our approach to ensure we stretch ourselves and go one step further."*

**Mike Pickering, Community and Sustainability Manager, The Midcounties Co-operative**

### Links and Downloads

[The Midcounties Co-operative Social Responsibility Report 2015/2016](#)

### Contact Details

For further information or help with strategy development, please contact the SWM team on 0121 237 5890 or [enquiries@swm.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@swm.org.uk).