

save our bank

Customer Union for Ethical Banking

CUEB 2024 AGM

New Director Applicant Biographies

Belinda Bell

Belinda works on mitigating systemic risk through the finance sector as Co-Director of Finance for Systemic Change, a research centre at the University of Cambridge. Much of her work focuses specifically on stopping the financing of fossil fuel expansion. To that end she leads a project to build a corporate bond index and another to identify and create cash deposit and money market fund products that exclude fossil fuel expansionists and their supply chains (utility companies, banks, insurers). The work of the Centre is very much applied research, making real-world interventions to drive urgent real economy change, including through changing the investment practices of the University itself.

Previously, Belinda has over 20 years leadership experience in establishing and growing innovative, impactful organisations. She founded Foundation East, a Community Development Finance Institution, in 2003 that provided SME and micro-enterprise lending, alongside a small amount of personal lending. This registered Society raised significant capital from community shares. She went on to found a series of other social enterprises before setting up Cambridge Social Ventures, the programmes at the University of Cambridge that teach social entrepreneurship.

Wholly committed to non-extractive legal structures and particularly interested in governance, Belinda has many years' experience as a NED and trustee. Most recently she was Chair of the Charity Mermaids, which supports transgender children and their families. At Cambridge, Belinda is a Visiting Fellow at the Judge Business School and a Senior Research Associate at Jesus College Intellectual Forum.

Sue Laughlin

I live in Glasgow and am a retired NHS planning and public health manager. I have been a customer of the Cooperative Bank since I was a teenager, choosing it for its history and stance.

Throughout my career I have also been active in the politics of health movement and am now part of the Peoples Health Movement Scotland (PHMS). I am also involved with a small collective in Glasgow, Solidarity Against Neoliberal Extremism (SANE), in recognition that poor health and health inequalities are intrinsically linked to our current economy. Both groups are now participating in work aimed at highlighting the benefits of a wellbeing economy.

My reason for wanting to join the Board of Save Our Bank is linked to the work outlined above. The banking sector plays a significant part in the reinforcement of the capitalist

economy and needs significant reform in the fight for social justice. For this to have a chance, it is important to have exemplars of a different approach to how banks operate. With the Cooperative Bank returning to the mutual fold, it seems to me that a campaign aiming to both democratise and extend the parameters of what it means to be an ethical bank has the potential to continue to exert pressure on the bank. If accepted onto the Board I would bring experience of strategy development and a grounding in social justice. As a member of another Board I am also familiar with the requirements of good governance.

Peter Harris

I am a Board member of the Co-operative Credit Union (CCU) and have additionally served on its Audit, Risk and Nominations Committees. I participated in the Credit Union's recent purpose project, which re-affirmed our core values and co-operative principles. This experience has given me a good working knowledge about credit unions, co-operative financial organisations, the mutual sector and governance more generally. All credit unions are co-operatives and have an important role providing financial services on a mutual basis, often to some of the most vulnerable in society.

I am a member and customer of the Co-operative Group, Co-operative Energy and the Phone Co-operative and have banked with The Co-operative Bank since the introduction of their ethical policy.

I have set up and managed my own consultancy business and my professional work has involved marketing impact analysis for a very wide range of organisations, including some pioneering ethical businesses. My support for the co-operative movement traces all the way back to when I studied economics at LSE with a focus on public sector economics, unemployment and the labour market, and the economics of co-operatives. For an educational charity, I campaigned for wider access to education opportunities and secured National Lottery funding for our summer schools.

Leslie Freitag

I've been a Co-operative Bank customer for many years, it was actually called the CWS bank when I joined in 1965. It is possible that - at just short of 60 years - I'm their longest serving customer.

The Co-op Bank has been my only bank. I joined Nationwide to, if needed, vote against demutualisation. Fortunately this was not required.

I was secretary of my local London Co-operative Society area committee in the 1960s. More recently I was twice elected to the Co-op Group Area Committee, Herts & Essex. As committee members we were encouraged to attend residential courses and many meetings in Manchester for AGMs, etc.

I've also attended Co-ops UK meetings in London and Cardiff, several 'Save our Bank' meetings in person in Manchester, and had significant involvement throughout my region. Therefore I feel quite au fait with the co-op movement in all its pluses and minuses!

I've put my name forward for the board of the Customer Union as I would like to see the acquisition of the Bank by Coventry BS prove to be successful and, equally importantly, prove a game changer in building society member involvement. At present participation is sadly extremely low.