

THE CO-OPERATIVE ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR 3,000 JOBS IN LEGAL SERVICES

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The Co-operative Group have announced today (24th May) plans to create 3,000 jobs in the legal sector as it continues to expand the range of services available to UK consumers.

The Group, which already has major interests in professional services including banking, insurance, pharmacy and funerals, will establish the jobs at Co-operative Legal Services, creating the largest consumer law business in the country.

In March, The Co-operative became the first major consumer brand to be granted alternative business structure (ABS) status under the new Legal Services Act, allowing it to offer a range of consumer legal services previously only available from private solicitors.

Group Chief Executive, Peter Marks said that over the next five years Co-operative Legal Services (<http://www.co-operative.coop/legalservices/>), which currently operates out of Bristol employing around 450 legally trained and support staff, would open five additional regional hubs across England and Wales and set up a new family law operation in London which is on schedule to launch later this year.

He also confirmed that the Group would extend its current trial of legal services and funeral planning services through 30 selected branches of The Co-operative Bank and Britannia to encompass all 330 high street branches.

“We already have a first class reputation for delivering professional services,” he added. “We see the law as yet another area where a Co-operative solution can be successfully applied for the customer’s benefit. Over the next five years we want to fundamentally change the face of legal services and make access far easier - today’s announcement underlines that ambition.

“We intend to be totally customer focussed and will help customers navigate the legal world so that they are much more comfortable with the experience and the outcomes.”

“It is envisaged that about 90 per cent of the roles being created will be actual legal functions, with 10 per cent made up of support staff.

“We are particularly keen to use our expansion as a way to offer opportunities to young people. Legal apprenticeships and opportunities for study leave will form an important part of this major employment opportunity.”

As well as family law, Co-operative Legal Services will offer a comprehensive range of consumer services - will writing; probate and estate administration; conveyancing; personal injury claims, family law and employment law services – all provided through either a convenient telephone service, via the web utilising new functionality, or through selected face-to face services.

Peter Marks explained: “When the new legal services legislation was drafted it was envisaged that it would enable a new range of businesses to enter the closed world of legal services. Our ambition is to

provide a service that will stop people feeling daunted by the prospect of having to work with a solicitor.

“We believe that the presence of The Co-operative’s trusted brand and values, our UK-wide branch network, first class people and services together with fair and fixed pricing options, will enable customers to find it much easier to access expert legal advice from someone they trust.”

Over the past five years The Co-operative Group has been one of the UK's fastest growing businesses, having acquired the Somerfield supermarket chain and having merged with the Britannia Building Society. It now operates 4,800 outlets, with at least one food store in every postcode area, and serves 20 million food shoppers each week.

As well as a food retailer, The Co-operative is a major financial services provider, operating The Co-operative Bank and The Co-operative Insurance. The largest consumer law business will sit along side the number one funeral services provider, the third largest pharmacy chain and one of Britain’s largest farming operations

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Notes to editors:

The Co-operative Group is the UK’s largest mutual business, with a business model which differs radically from that of plcs. It is owned not by private shareholders but by over seven million consumers, who have a democratic say in the way its businesses are run.

The Group operates 4,800 retail trading outlets and has an annual turnover of more than £13bn. It is the UK’s fifth biggest food retailer and a major financial services provider, operating The Co-operative Bank and The Co-operative Insurance. Among its other businesses are the number one funeral services provider, the third largest pharmacy chain and one of Britain’s largest farming operations. As well as having clear financial and operational objectives, the Group has also set out its social and sustainability goals in its groundbreaking Ethical Plan, which specifies over 50 commitments in these areas.

Over the last five years, the Group has undergone a transformation with a major expansion of its food and financial services businesses. The Group is committed to creating 2,000 apprenticeships across its family of businesses by 2014 and it has already doubled the number of apprentices it will take on this year to 800.

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