



Strategic Plan

2022 - 2024

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Manager's Report



We are very proud to bring you the strategic plan 2022-2024 for The Urban Co-op & Wellness Hub in Limerick. A plan that is grounded in experience and realism and one that is a welcome map for our future following the last few years of disruption to our lives. This strategic plan provides us with a roadmap to guide us in prioritising what is most important to us all moving forward.

This plan is important to us because it builds on the foundation created by our first strategic plan, which was a timely outcome from our Social Enterprise Fund award in 2019. Our fledgling experience at that stage of development has given a structure on which to anchor and set forth.

As the saying goes, life happens while you are busy making plans and indeed we all know that there were many obstacles that came in the way of progress for social enterprises in these turbulent years. Being an enterprise that provides nutritious food access to the community, the primal instinct prioritised the importance of this venture at a time when priorities were quickly shifting.

Our resilience is defined by the ability to adapt to change and this document sets forth the vision for the future of The Urban Co-op informed by the experience gained along the way.

For many during the pandemic this need to return to basics has been a recurring theme. It has inspired us to also get back to our own roots as an enterprise and from this the central concept on which our direction forward is proposed. The Urban Co-op needs to fulfil its original plan to become an urban co-operative as envisaged by the founders!

The form in which The Urban Co-op took root and has grown to its 10th year is surprising for many when they learn that it is a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) and not officially registered as a co-operative. In order to kickstart the momentum of enthusiasm at the time of inception the decision to use a CLG framework was, in hindsight, possibly fortuitous and may have ensured the continuity of the concept to this point. The promise to change to a registered co-operative was an intention parked for a later time.

That time has come. So why now?

87% of our members surveyed in recent months believe it is the right direction for The Urban Co-op and fulfils the original vision. The Urban Co-op has a loyal and growing following of members throughout the years, as well as an expanding network of partners. This has put us on the map. Not just in Limerick, but far beyond.

We have worked hard to make this social enterprise a part of our community, and it has flourished in these years. It is a significant achievement to get to 10 years and we understand the efforts involved to get to this point. We also understand that to grow further and ensure the long term viability and sustainability of The Urban Co-op, the shared responsibility and ownership model is the logical way to go. A sustainable food system is our goal and making the journey from CLG to co-operative is how we can get there!

With over 2300 members and many more supporters, we have a significant social capital and experienced what this model is all about. It is no longer a concept and idea to convince people. It is a living, breathing and working model of business that has aspired to be a fair and sustainable alternative to commercial profit oriented business.

In recent years, we have been reminded that the wealthy elite own and control more resources at the expense of many. Being hostage to such a dynamic is disempowering. We need to redress the balance one small step at a time. The Urban Co-op aims to offer an opportunity for change.

We do not want this enterprise to be controlled and owned by a few. We want it to be collectively owned. Everyone with skin in the game to make it succeed. That is how we work as a community. When it matters to you we invest more time, resources and energy. In doing so, reciprocity kicks in and we all benefit.

Our Strategic Plan 2022-2024 sets out the framework for us as we chart our journey into new territory.

The question is do you want to come on board the ark and join us for this exciting phase forward?

Anne Maher

Managing Director | Urban Co-op

Overview

The Urban Co-op is proud to be the first co-operative grocery store in Limerick - controlled and operated by its members. We sell wholesome food at affordable prices, and we strive to create an environmentally sustainable supply chain that prioritizes local producers and the local economy.

Since the launch of our community Wellness Hub, our store has become a gathering place for our community. We provide a variety of classes, workshops and events that help promote personal health, wellbeing and space for community dialogue and relationship building.

The combination of our sociable grocery service and wellness offerings creates a unique value proposition for our members. Our goal is to create a sustainable and healthy food system that benefits the community and the environment while being affordable, time-efficient, and stress free.

The Urban Co-op began 2013 as a buying club selling fruit and vegetables, bread and eggs. We quickly grew with a move to a physical store on Mulgrave Street and then, later, to Tait House. By the end of 2017, we had 900 members. This made us eager to find a place that would accommodate our growth for years to come, and which would also allow us to provide additional services to our members.

In 2018, the Eastway site move provided us with a 6-fold increase in the size of our store, which allowed us to offer new services through our Community Wellness Hub. Its spaciousness has helped to accommodate the growing demand for local produce, accelerated by Covid lockdowns and the climate emergency.

Our vision is to serve as a model for the development of urban co-operatives in the Mid-west and further afield.

Our Mission

The Urban Co-op mission is to be a successful model of co-operative, providing high-quality produce and enhancing the lives of our members, customers, and the community. We work together to create a more sustainable and equitable world.

We place value on teamwork and collaboration. We recognise that a positive supportive environment will facilitate our community to thrive.

Our enterprising focus encourages learning by doing, with the freedom to make mistakes and the wisdom to teach others along the way.

Our Purpose

Our goal is to work together to create a thriving community food co-op, wellness hub, and educational space that benefits everyone involved, and the environment.

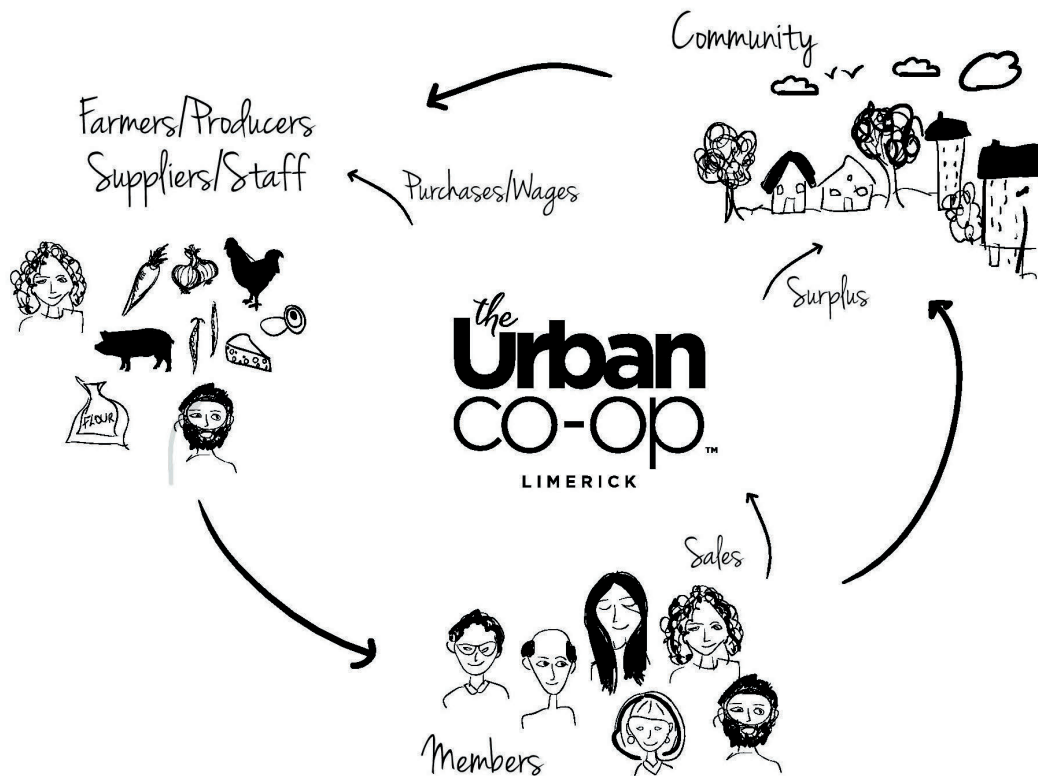
We are a cooperative business that adheres to the Principles of Cooperatives and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

This ensures that our actions benefit our members and the community as a whole.



Participatory Culture

We work hard to create a participatory culture where the public are not just passive consumers, but also active participants and creators.



It has certainly built back up my confidence and made me a happier person to realise that yeah there's different facets to my life it's just not all about being Adams mom and carer.

I'm Eleanor as an individual and that's lovely and I love coming into work. I love the banter between the team here and and I really feel supported always, I have to say. I'm given a chance to improve myself and that feels very good. I feel valued, I'm listening to and I'm heard and that feels good 'cause I've got my own life experience like everybody else here.

We're all vital. We are all cogs making this little engine go and it's lovely.

Participatory Culture

We are committed to educating and motivating our customers to consume more Irish produce by actively working to replace imports with local products.

When we found **Garryhinch Wood Exotic Mushrooms** we were delighted to introduce these high quality nourishing foods to our members.



Garryhinch are a family run organic mushroom farm located on the banks of the river Barrow in County Offaly. They cultivate their exotic mushrooms on wooden blocks made only from trees sourced from sustainably managed forests. These tasty mushrooms have a high nutritional as well as medicinal value.

Although imported mushrooms were cheaper, we have worked hard to reduce their use and now only carry Irish mushrooms. By working this way, product by product, we are reducing our dependency on imports and building our food sovereignty.



The Urban Co-op was a life saver for me back in 2013, at a time of major change in my life. As a co-founder, member and supplier, I am proud and amazed in equal measure at all that has been achieved since then, and I look forward to the next chapter, secure in the knowledge that it is in excellent hands.

So many of our goals have been achieved, supplying wholesome, affordable food, encouraging local producers, promoting organic and sustainable initiatives and, providing employment in the community. As I step down from the board I am excited to continue as a supplier/member, being part of and contributing to this community focused and nourishing social enterprise.

- Kathy MacAndrew Wallace

Our Activities

SPACE	PURPOSE	STATUS
GROCERY	Physical members' shopping space plus related storage area	Fully operational, open 7 days a week
WELLNESS HUB	A range of general and purpose-built spaces to complement the grocery store offerings and to drive our social impact objectives around health and wellbeing, social engagement and community ownership.	Fully operational, currently operating at an estimated 55% capacity
WELLNESS HUB (PROPOSED)	Activities, events, etc. will generally be run by local partners who rent the space from us; but there will also be regular TUC-run events and activities.	Under development – capacity to run events pending staffing resources
OFFICE / STAFF SPACE	Back office space currently used by board and volunteers – of sufficient size to accommodate proposed staff team.	Partially operational, fully operational by Dec 2022

Our Activities

- As of July 2022, we have 2328 community/co-operative members who, on average, shop with us 1.02 times per month and spend €32 per shop.
- Our membership is open to all, with a variety of membership options that allow for different levels of contribution and commitment while encouraging access to great food for everyone.
- Our increasing customer base reflects ethically conscious consumers, health seeking individuals and families, customers with mental health challenges.
- Many families find it increasingly difficult to source healthy foods with mega-chain supermarkets prioritising ultra processed and heavily marketed products.
- Traded income is based on the model of Regenerator, The Good Asset, and Fair Share trading models.
- 65% of our food supplies are currently sourced from Irish suppliers with active efforts to displace imports where possible.
- We currently employ 5 full time and 4 part time staff.
- The organisation is overseen and guided by the volunteer board of experienced professionals:
 - John Liston (Chairperson)
 - Danilly Carvalho
 - Linda Mullins
 - Robert Meyer
 - Tracy O'Donaghue
 - Anne Maher (Managing Director)
 - Geraldine Fitzpatrick
- We are supported by a variety of volunteers from different networks including the National Learning Network and Daughters of Charity.
- We are now open 7-days a week having grown from the starting point of one hour a week.

Our Goals



Community Empowerment

By engaging with our community to strengthen human relationships and inspire action.



Responsible Food System Development

By collaborating and participating with our community to develop sustainable food systems locally.



Good Health and Wellbeing

By provision of a supportive participatory environment that maintains our community on our wellness journey.



Economic Resilience

By building on local resources and capacities to ensure economic stability and sustainable livelihoods.



Nourishing Food Access

By promoting sustainable agriculture and local food security to ensure access to nutritious and appropriate food for all.



Advocacy and Activism

By energizing our members to identify and engage with issues affecting the Co-op and the community's future.

Theory of Change

Inputs

1

We focus on cooperative relationships with local suppliers to make our products available to our members seven days a week.

2

We provide a space for wellbeing initiatives that offer classes and courses to our members through our network of therapists who are focused on health, wellbeing and social interaction.

3

We coordinate events, training, and work placements that help develop new skills and encourage social engagement, all while promoting wellbeing.

Outputs

Local suppliers have closer contact with consumers and build confidence to grow their business.

Members access multiple services in a single location in a low-stress, welcoming environment.

New connections lead to stronger community relationships, participation and rootedness

Local suppliers and therapists enjoy a long term, stable and reliable source of business

Members, volunteers, and suppliers can meet, connect and engage with others in their community.

SME's develop greater sense of responsibility towards community via the Urban Co-op.

Creating an environment to inspire action

Outcomes

Minimised carbon footprint of grocery store and greater appreciation of environmental issues.

Improved economic livelihood opportunities for local suppliers

Better health and wellbeing outcomes for members

Inclusive community engagement for increased social capital

Objectives 2022-24

From August – November 2021, the board of the Urban Co-op Limerick undertook a review to define a 3-year strategy (2022-2024) and articulate a set of objectives for this period including financial projections.

These strategic objectives use metrics emerging from our theory of change to set time-lined, measurable targets for each of the 3 years i.e. our definition of success in the medium term. Successful implementation of these objectives will ensure the long-term sustainability of the project.

1

Scale Impact

We will use our existing membership and networks to establish our cooperative model.

This will help us to ensure the long-term growth of our services, which will be further enhanced with the launch of a number of pilot projects including a new online experience for our members.

2

Operational Management

We are committed to growing our operations over the next three years. We will enhance our core team by recruiting new and experienced members.

Second, the move towards a co-operative model will help us to foster a participatory culture across the organisation.

3

Monitoring and Evaluation

We will continue to improve our systems and monitor our progress towards achieving our strategic goals.

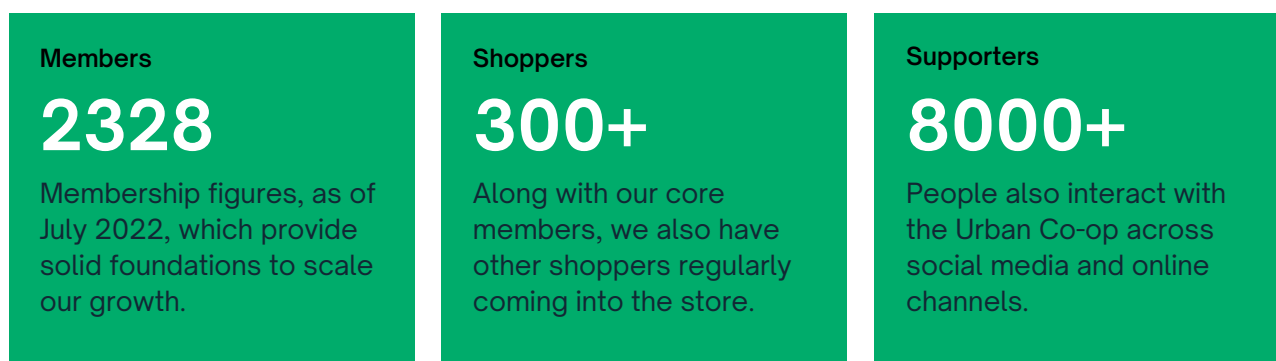
This includes better communication with our members, evaluating our products and services, and reflecting on our social impact.

Scale Growth

We have experienced consistent and healthy membership growth and there is scope to grow further – based on our estimate of the site’s ‘catchment area’ we believe there is potential to build a membership base of 3000 households.

Driven by membership demand, we will be introducing an online ordering and delivery service over the next 18-24 months; this is likely to increase the potential membership footprint by enabling us to reach people living further away and local residents who cannot come to the store in person for some reason, e.g. older people, disabled people, busy families, etc. As a first step in operationalising this development we will introduce a click and collect grocery service from late 2022.

In addition to growing the number of members, our social impact and our sustainability model is built on our ability to convince members through our offering to view the Urban Co-op as their go-to for their regular food shop as part of a sustainable consumption ethos and, while they are with us, to take the opportunity to interact with others and/or attend a class or event.



Accordingly, our membership growth objectives is more than about just membership numbers; it also includes some other important metrics, specifically:

- Frequency of members’ shopping visits.
- How much members spend when they come to shop with us.
- How often shoppers decide to avail themselves of some of the other services we offer.
- Engagement and dialogue with others at the Urban Co-op (qualitative measures).

The metrics relating to these areas are introduced later in the document. It is acknowledged that the previous strategic plan (2019) recognised the value of these metrics prior to the impact of closures of social gathering spaces.

Scale Growth

The Urban Co-op's Wellness Hub is an important part of our grocery store offering and essential to realising our social impact model. The combination of both offerings in one place creates a space that members can feel a tangible sense of ownership in, and which strengthens our community more broadly.

Our Wellness Hub comprises the following current and prospective offerings:

- **Plunkett, Gema, Kelly rooms:** existing spaces that are currently rented for a range of activities - yoga, pilates, speaker events, seminars, educational events/performing arts productions, therapeutic services. Current use of these rooms by therapists is driven by the demand and skills offered.
- **Reception area:** This multifunctional space offers an open social space for gatherings, small meetings and as a venue for food & craft fair stall holders.
- **Meitheal Room**(to be operational by early-2022): Due to the demand as a result of the impact of Covid this space (originally earmarked for a kitchen space) is proposed to be used as an additional therapy space.

The Wellness Hub is more than just a social gathering place - it's also an important source of income for the community. By the third year of our projections, it will generate €65k worth of revenue. We have set aside €15k for the capital works necessary to establish the Meitheal Room.

Our Wellness Hub was originally conceived to include a demo kitchen on site. Covid's impact has shifted priorities in response to community needs, enabling the space to be put to use for therapeutic purposes. In this strategic plan, we are switching our focus to provide a city centre offsite kitchen in partnership with other organisations. This will help to bring about our vision of having cooked food options for our members. The objectives of this direction are as follows:

Zero Waste

To further our goal of sustainable consumption, we propose to use the food that would have been wasted, to create cooked meals that can be sold.

Education & Fundraising

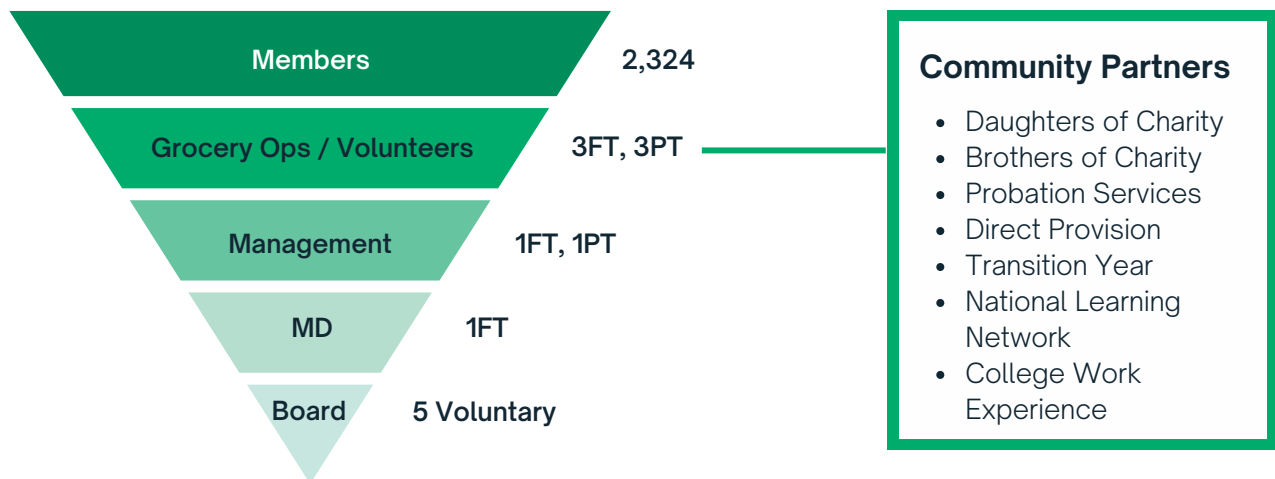
We will explore opportunities for collaborative social events that combine education and fundraising to encourage sustainable livelihoods.

Food Tours

We have a long-standing relationship with local suppliers, which allows us to promote the benefits of sustainable farming practices to a wider audience.

Operational Management

From a volunteer-led organisation, The Urban Co-op has been transitioning to a full staffing model to oversee, manage and implement operations. The existing operational structure is visualised below:



The impact of the pandemic has had a significant impact on this process of transition:

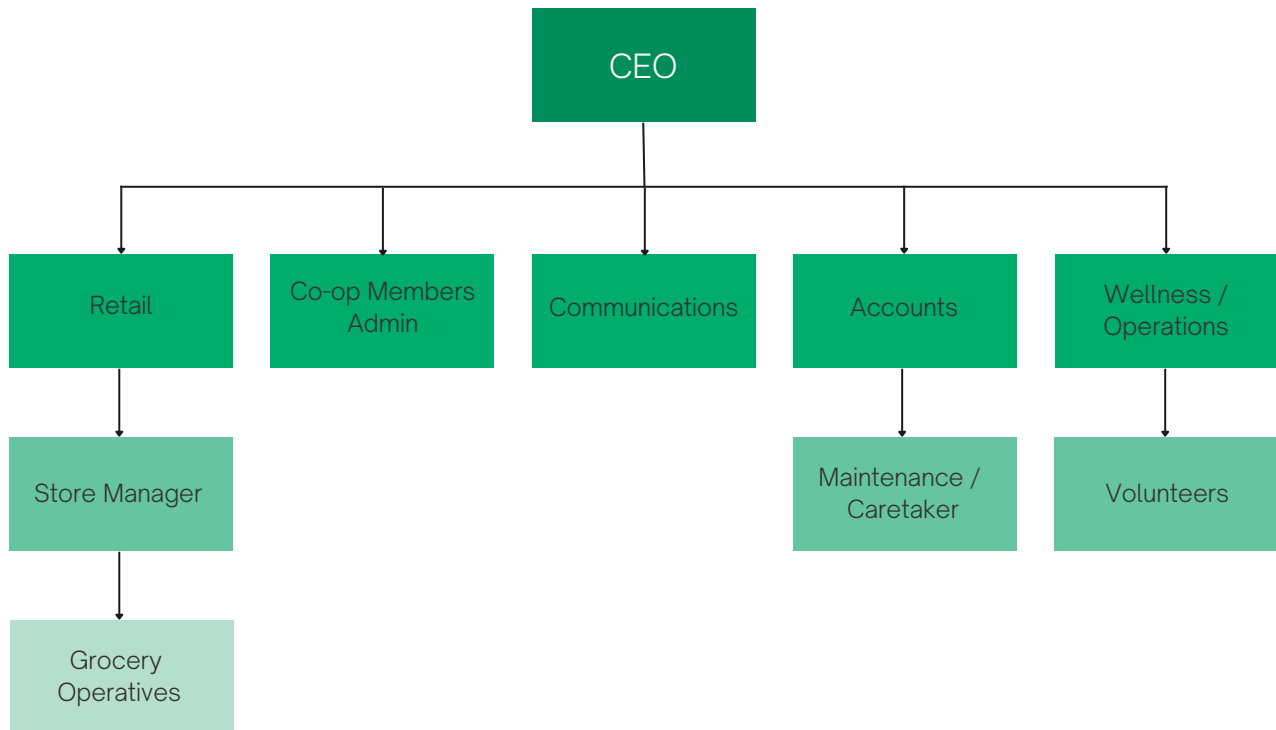
- A loss of volunteer support commitment.
- Reduction of board members and social capital.
- Significant staffing cost increases with loss of income from room rental.

The management team support the running of day-to-day operations so that the 7-day service is available. Voluntary hours contribute to strategic management time.

Looking to the future there is now an imperative to transition to a fully sustainable staffing model. This will enable us to operate the desired opening hours for the grocery store of 09:00-19:00 Monday-Saturday and reduced opening hours on Sunday; and full day (including evening) timeslots for the Wellness Hub spaces. It also anticipates new activities and organised events.

Our goal is to recruit a full staff complement by 2022/2024 – a total of 14 full-time employees.

Operational Management



The variety of roles reflects the many different activities that are currently taking place. The roles are more generalized, but they're streamlined for efficiency. We want everyone to have a meaningful and fulfilling role, no matter what their area of expertise may be. This includes support in roles that are specifically defined for them.

The running of the grocery requires skills such as logistics, customer service, and implementing our zero waste policies. The Wellness Hub requires coordination and event management skills. Co-operative administration and marketing are essential to managing the increasing membership numbers and financial support.

Our volunteers join the organisation through our community partners which includes disability groups, direct provision and probation services. They will continue to play an important role in the organisation, but with more support and guidance from our core members of staff. This will help the organisation grow closer to its members and the community, strengthening the connection between all involved.

Monitoring and Evaluation

KPIs	2021 BASELINE	2022	2023	2024
SCALE				
# OF MEMBERS	2300 members	2550 members	2750 members	3000 members
# OF ACTIVE MEMBERS	13 visits per member per year on average	15 visits per member per year on average	17 visits per member per year on average	17 visits per member per year on average
AVERAGE SPEND PER SHOP	Average spend per shop = €32	Average spend per shop = €32	Average spend per shop = €33	Average spend per shop = €34
NO OF ATTENDEES AT CLASSES/EVENTS	1746	2500	3500	4000

- Our monitoring and evaluation shows continuous growth in our membership base with more repeat visits per month and a rising spend in-store.
- As more members visit to shop, they also tend to sign up for classes and events and we anticipate a growth in these figures as we roll out new events and expand the capacity of our Wellness Hub.
- These growth figures show that our members' loyalty to the organisation is growing stronger. As we make more effort to harness the power of our community network, the organisation's capacity to have a wider reach and lasting social impact is also growing.
- Quantitative data will be enhanced with more qualitative insights to capture the stories that bring together members, suppliers and supporters that tell the story of the Urban Co-op and it's wide reaching impact.

Monitoring and Evaluation

KPIs	2021 BASELINE	2022	2023	2024
ECONOMIC INDICATORS				
NUMBER OF LOCAL SUPPLIERS	170 local suppliers	190 local suppliers	210 local suppliers	230 local suppliers
€ INVESTED IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY	€720K invested in local economy	€1,087K invested in local economy (70% of cost of sales)	€1,243K invested in local economy (72% of cost of sales)	€1,435K invested in local economy (75% of cost of sales)
DISPLACED IMPORTS	3 displaced imports	5 displaced imports	5 displaced imports	5 displaced imports
LOCAL SUPPLIER CASE STUDIES	3 supplier case studies	5 new local supplier case studies	5 new local supplier case studies	5 new local supplier case studies

- These economic indicators highlight the importance of the Urban Co-op to the local economy. Through our close relationship with suppliers we are reducing our dependency on imported products, investing in the local economy and creating meaningful training and employment opportunities.

Monitoring and Evaluation

KPIs	2021 BASELINE	2022	2023	2024
HEALTH AND WELLBEING INDICATORS				
MEMBER CASE STUDIES	3 new member case studies	5 new member case studies	5 new member case studies	5 new member case studies
WEEKLY TRANSACTION CUSTOMER NUMBERS	604	700	800	900
# NO OF EVENTS	873	1000	1200	1400

- Promoting health and wellness are central to our strategic plans. We achieve this through events and activities that strengthen ties in the community and create local employment opportunities for professional practitioners.

Monitoring and Evaluation

KPIs	2021 BASELINE	2022	2023	2024
ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS				
% OF IMPORTED PRODUCE	35% of produce imported	34% of produce imported	32% of produce imported	30% of produce imported
% WASTAGE OF FOOD SUPPLIES	1% wastage of food supplies	1% wastage of food supplies	0.5% wastage of food supplies	0.5% wastage of food supplies
% WASTED FOOD USED ELSEWHERE	80% of wasted food used elsewhere	80% of wasted food used elsewhere	90% of wasted food used elsewhere	100% of wasted food used elsewhere

- Food is one of the many factors that contribute to climate change. Our food production and distribution processes account for a large share of greenhouse gas emissions. Through careful monitoring and evaluation of our supply chains we can highlight the importance of the co-operative model to reverse this trend.

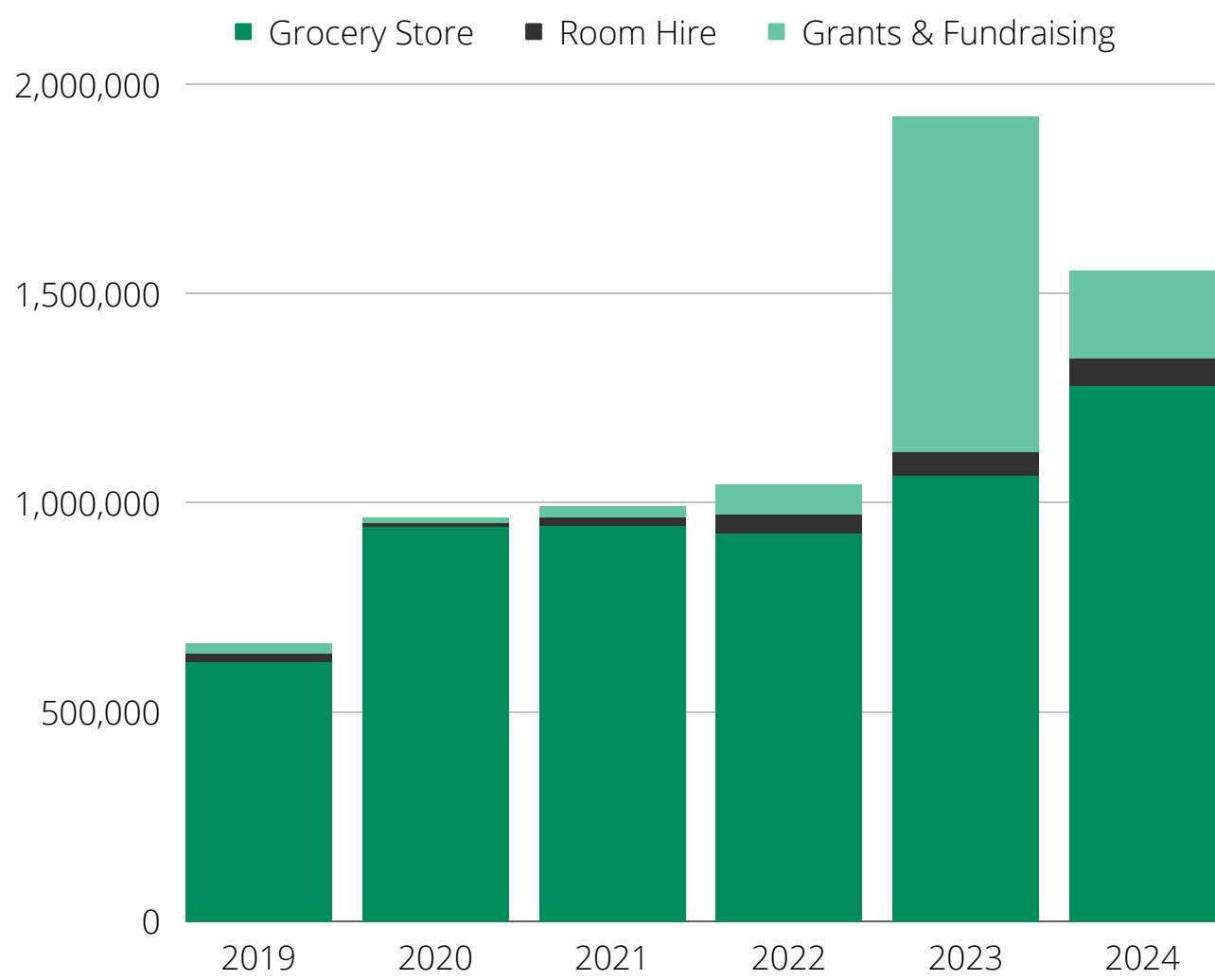
Financials

INCOME	DESCRIPTION
GROCERY STORE	<p>Income growth driven by membership growth. In addition, we aim to grow the number of times members shop with us and their average spend per shop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average number of shoppers grows from 1.6/month in 2022 to 2/month in 2022 • Average spend per shop grows from €22 in 2022 to €25.50 by 2024
ROOM HIRE	<p>Developed by setting targets for rental days per month and price points for each of the spaces that form the Wellness Hub.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each space rented for 10-18 full days per month by 2022 • Price for full day's rental ranges from €100 (Plunkett, Meitheal) to €60 (Kelly, Gema)
FUNDRAISING AND GRANTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have set targets for fundraising and grant income. • Co-operative Share Capital will be an important element of community engagement and ownership and we will be driving this through our membership. • Grant income opportunities include government funding under existing social enterprise schemes and other enterprise grant support schemes. • In line with sustainable consumption targets, international grants will also be sought.
FOOD TOURS/EVENTS	<p>As a co-ordinating hub we have the potential for facilitating food tourism network as part of our ethos to promote local farmers. This potential income stream will be trialled in 2022.</p> <p>With the support of a businesses in the proximity we have the potential capacity to facilitate high-end food events such as celebrity chef demonstrations and supper clubs</p>

Financials

EXPENDITURE	DESCRIPTION
COST OF SALES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on our historic gross margin for grocery sales, which incorporates our ethos and policy of fair, sustainable pricing for our local suppliers. Gross profit assumption fixed at 30% for all years 2022-2024. Gross profit margin has to date included room rental. The objective to build sustainable margins in the grocery aspect is a priority.
STAFF COSTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment timing for the full staff team has been modelled over 2022 and 2023, with full staffing model in place from 2023. We have used our knowledge of the grocery sector and NGO / social enterprise sector to set expected salary levels for all new staffing roles.
CAPITAL COSTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of remaining Wellness Hub spaces - €15K in 2021/22. This is in line with the move to a full cooperative model with access to members' share capital. We aim to set up a satellite store in a city centre location that reflects the ethos and brand of The Urban Co-op with a strong element of ready-to-eat foods and space for the community.
OPERATING COSTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on our historic operating costs but scaled up to reflect full scale operation in our current site and growth in activity in both grocery store and Wellness Hub. There is a potential provision for a supported extra premises delivered through a shared value strategic partnership. Operating costs are expected to double in 2024 compared to our 2020 baseline.

Financials



Financials

INCOME	2022	2023	2024
GROCERY REVENUE	926,000	1,064,900	1,277,880
ROOM HIRE / EVENTS	45,000	55,000	65,000
GRANTS / FUNDRAISING	71,000	802,000	210,000
TOTAL INCOME	1,042,000	1,921,900	1,552,880
GROCERY COST OF SALES	657,460	756,079	907,295
URBAN CO-OP GROSS PROFIT	384,540	1,165,821	645,585
CAPITAL COSTS	10,000	150,000	10,000
STAFFING COSTS	215,868	327,936	340,548
OPERATING COSTS	169,100	223,500	262,000
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	394,968	701,436	612,548
URBAN CO-OP SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)	(10,428)	464,385	33,037

Call to Action

Equality is one of the core values of the co-operative model. The Urban Co-op wants to make sure that our actions reflect our values. With this call to action we ask you to help us to achieve this. Building on our previous work, this strategic plan is designed to invite a broad and deep base of support from our key partners in order to have a more significant impact.

We understand that we are masters of our own destiny and can shape the world we want to live in. An egalitarian approach reflected in the co-operative model motivates our actions. Our independence and sovereignty allows us to fulfil our mission and goals with the support of strategic partners to build community health and wealth. These partners include:



Our members

We call on our members to invest in the future of The Urban Co-op by seeking Share Capital and supporting its continued operation as a full, member-led, multi stakeholder cooperative.



Our Community

We call on social organisations and networks in Limerick, and beyond, to work with us to reach new communities through sustainable education and knowledge sharing.



Our Funders

We call on interested funding agencies to wisely utilise the platform of The Urban Co-op as a gateway to accelerate social impact and build community wealth.



Thank You

We would like to thank you for taking the time to review our strategic plan. For further information and details on how you can get involved visit us in-store or online:

www.theurbanco-op.ie

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