



Lincolnshire Co-op
Stanley Bett House
15-23 Tentercroft Street
Lincoln LN5 7DB
www.lincolnshire.coop

Communications
01522 785 289
Daisy.Twine@lincolnshire.coop

MEDIA RELEASE

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Grantham Travel Manager made CEO for a day

Helaina Plant, Travel Manager at Lincolnshire Co-op's Grantham branch, was selected from **86 apprentices** to shadow CEO Alison Hands.

Throughout the day at the Support Centre in Lincoln, Helaina attended high-level meetings, received valuable coaching and guidance, and enjoyed the opportunity to network with others in the business, too.

Since joining the co-operative only **three years ago**, Helaina has completed an internal development course, progressed to the role of manager, and is now studying for a **Level 4 Retail Manager apprenticeship**.

She said: "When I first found out I had been selected for this opportunity, I was a bit nervous, but as the day went on, I felt more confident, and found that elements of my experience were directly applicable to some of the meetings that I attended."

"I've learned so much throughout my career at Lincolnshire Co-op, but this day felt like a real milestone. It reminded me that leadership is about inspiring, motivating, and guiding others towards a shared goal, while empowering them to reach their full potential.

"I also realised that growth often comes from stepping outside your comfort zone. Not everything will be easy, but with determination and the inspiring attitude I saw from Alison during my shadowing experience, anything is possible when you set your mind to it."

This opportunity was arranged by the society's Learning and Development Team, in line with National Apprenticeship Week 2026.

As well as presenting opportunities for further development, the scheme enables colleagues to have a wider understanding of business operations, and the opportunities available to them.

Alison said: *"I've really enjoyed meeting and working with Helaina, her story so far is incredibly inspiring, and I admire her tenacious attitude.*

"These kinds of experiences are so important, as it allows me to get honest and real feedback, build connections with colleagues who work in different locations, and hopefully, help to shape our future leaders!"

In the last financial year, Lincolnshire Co-op reported 21,816 hours of learning, across apprenticeships and other development opportunities.

Additionally, the society offers work experience opportunities, careers guidance sessions and employability workshops.

Careers Development Lead, Erika Stainton, said: *“As a large local employer, we recognise our responsibility in shaping our future workforce, and we believe that schemes such as these give people the skills and confidence they need to make significant contributions to our communities.”*

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For more information contact:
Daisy Twine, Senior Communications Co-ordinator
(01522) 785 289 or 07485 301 349
Daisy.Twine@lincolnshire.coop
CONTACT DETAILS NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Notes to editors:

1. **Lincolnshire Co-op** is an independent co-operative society. Its purpose is to bring together ideas, energy and resources to make life better in communities. It has around 300,000 members and 2,900 local colleagues in Lincolnshire and the surrounding counties and an elected board of directors who oversee the business.
The society provides **valued services** and supports the **local economy** from outlets across its trading area including food stores, filling stations, post offices, travel branches, funeral homes, a florist, a crematorium and community libraries. It also cares for people’s **health and wellbeing** through its pharmacies and support for a network of wellbeing walks. Local good causes benefit through its Community Champions scheme and together, colleagues and members also look after the **local environment** through volunteering.
As well as its trading outlets, Lincolnshire Co-op owns properties, from flats and houses to commercial premises. The society brings land and buildings back into use to create attractive environments. With Lincolnshire Co-op as landlord, rents stay local and are invested in schemes that benefit the community.