

Background notes on the meeting about developing local support for the ESLCU Credit Union to be held at Sudbury Town Council Offices on 23rd September at 2pm.

Introduction

Some months ago St Gregory's Church Parochial Church Council decided to explore the possibility of the church becoming more directly involved in supporting our local Credit Union, the Eastern Savings and Loans Credit Union. Our initial idea was perhaps to offer church premises, but discussion with ESLCU clarified that Sudbury Town Council already provide initial access to application forms and some other services, though the numbers were not high, and currently this option is not listed on the ESLCU web site. The Chief executive, Chris Mole felt, though, that it would be worthwhile to explore options for further support, including promoting awareness of the service.

At this point we decided to broaden potential involvement and set up an initial meeting which also involved the Deputy Town Clerk, Jacqui Howells.

That meeting took place early in July and we met with Sally Chicken, a Volunteer Director of ESLCU, who gave a briefing on the nature of the Credit Union and their approach to community involvement and support.

Summary of briefing

The main points are as follows:

- ESLCU is the Credit Union for Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.
- Like all Credit Unions it is regulated by the same regulatory bodies as banks
- It provides a range of financial services to people including savings accounts, loans up to £3,000, a current account and a pre-paid Visa card. It also offers group or club accounts
- It has paid staff in Suffolk and Norfolk and over 50 volunteers.

Sally Chicken summarised the main themes as follows:

- ESLCU is growing across the Eastern Region
- It is a safe place to save
- It provides affordable credit and has low entry requirements so is a direct alternative to the payday loans industry.
- It is owned by its members
- It provides safe and well-regulated services.

You can read more about ESLCU at: www.eslcu.co.uk

Sally said that the model ESLCU used was to have a Steering Group in each of the population centres where it was working and aiming to develop. Two efforts have been made to set up a Steering Group for Sudbury previously but

these failed. Given the support of the Town Council this seemed a good time to try again.

Current position in Sudbury and the role of the Town Council

Currently the Town Council staff act on behalf of the Credit Union and receive payments and deal with membership enquiries. At present there are about 70 members but there is clearly potential for significant growth.

The Town Council does see this as a valuable facility for local residents and as they already deal on behalf of the District Council with benefit and rent collection matters the Credit Union fits in well to their activities. Jacqui Howells, Deputy Town Clerk, indicated that they would be able to cope with an expansion of this work and staff would also welcome further training.

Sudbury is therefore well placed in that there are already premises, good access and available staff, which means that a Steering Group could concentrate on promoting and developing the service.

Key issues and next steps

At the July meeting it was clear that the Credit Union faced three main issues in Sudbury

- 1. Lack of awareness of its existence**
- 2. The need for a local steering group**
- 3. A perception that it is something only for the poor.**

This last point is very important. While many of us are motivated by a wish to see fairer access to credit for people who cannot obtain this easily from the main stream finance system ESLCU stresses that it can provide valuable alternative services across the whole community, and to grow it needs members who will join, save with them, borrow, and increase the scale of the operation

In facilitating early steps we found the Archbishop of Canterbury's recent letter to the Church as a whole very clear

'Our faith in Christ calls us to love the poor and vulnerable with our actions. That is why the Church must be actively involved in supporting the development of real lending alternatives, such as credit unions. We must help credit unions to become bigger, better known and easier to access if we want them to compete effectively with high interest lenders.'

He went on to urge churches and churchgoers to support local credit unions by becoming members (opening accounts to save or borrow money, alongside existing accounts); raising awareness of them in their local

community; offering church premises as community access points; or by volunteering professional skills to help a credit union develop.

It was clear from our first meeting that we needed to involve other churches, but also key local sources of expertise and experience. For these reasons we have broadened to invite representatives from other churches and also from Rotary and the CAB.

The meeting on 23rd

The main focus of the meeting will be to explore in more detail the setting up of a Steering Group, but attendance at the meeting does not mean that you will necessarily be expected to become a member! However, hopefully some volunteers will emerge.

The meeting will become with a further briefing, questions and answers about ESLCU and about the role of steering committees, and hopefully we can make progress from there.

I hope that these notes provide a helpful background to the meeting and look forward to seeing you then. The agenda is on the next page.

John Hedge.

12th September 2014

Agenda for meeting about ESLCU

Sudbury Town Council Offices on 23rd September at 2p.m.

- 1) Introductions and apologies**
- 2) Updating briefing by ESLCU and questions**
- 3) Role of Steering Groups and procedure for establishing one for Sudbury**
- 4) Contribution of the Town Council and its staff**
- 5) Discussion and agreement on next steps towards setting up a Steering Group**
- 6) Any other business**