

Brief for Area Board meeting 9th March

On February 2nd 2015, South Wiltshire Credit Union announced it had changed its name to Wiltshire Savings and Loans and at the same time opened a new community branch on the Tidworth Leisure Centre. The main reason for the change is to position the credit union for future growth outside of its traditional area of South Wiltshire.

Why have they changed name? Simply because the words credit union do not mean very much to the average person on the street. Despite the press coverage on payday lenders and the need for credit unions to be seen as the alternative for those who require access to unsecured loans there still seems to be confusion in the minds of the general public. Wiltshire Savings and Loans does exactly what it says and where it does it, what could be clearer.

With the new name comes a new user friendly website and a Facebook page. This too is the basis for the credit union's growth as it looks to provide more online services so it can reach people in remote parts of Wiltshire as well as in towns. And yet with all this change its ethos remains one of a not-for-profit cooperative whose aim is to improve the financial wellbeing of the community.

One place where there is real need for the savings and loans services is the Army. With hundreds of soldiers returning from Germany over the next few years there will be all to resettlement costs to finance. And for those families already here they face the financial challenges of everyday life in Tidworth and other military towns. But the services are not just for military families but apply just as much to civilian families, so Tidworth seemed the ideal place to bring both of these together.

Tidworth Mums is an organisation that has made a huge impact in bringing civilian and Army families together. Following an introduction by Mary Cullen, Wiltshire Savings and Loans and Tidworth Mums have joined forces to bring savings and loans services to the community through a branch based in the Hive at the Tidworth Leisure Centre. Involved with and in strong support of the launch was the Mayor, Chris Franklin, the garrison commander Col. James Denny and Wiltshire County Council represented by Chris Williams.

The launch was a huge success with coverage from the main Wiltshire papers and both Spire FM and BBC Radio Wiltshire. It was also covered by the Army media of Drumbeat and BFBS. Like any new branch it will be slow to take off at first but once the word gets round we are confident it will flourish.

The branch is located at the Tidworth Leisure Centre and is open on Mondays from 10:30 to 11:30. The lead volunteer is Jodie Lugg. It will take applications for membership, open savings accounts, process loan applications and provide facilities to deposit cash and withdraw money that has previously been requested. All facilities, services and the location of our branches can be found on our website which is: www.wiltshiresavingsandloans.org.uk Tel: 01722 421881, e-mail: swcu@hotmail.com

And looking to the future we will see more branches opening up and possibly a bringing together of all the credit union services in Wiltshire. In this endeavour we would like to see Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire Money take a role in helping us achieve this.