

SOCIETY matters

A focus on financial resilience and wellbeing



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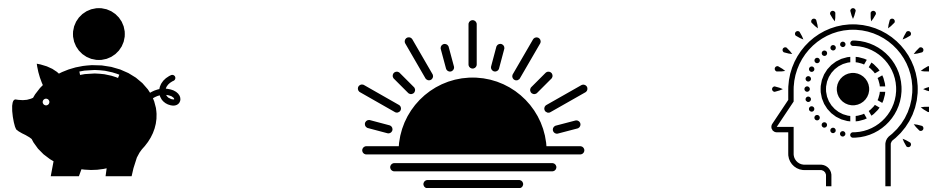
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Hello and welcome to the autumn edition of
Society Matters



In this edition we focus on the work BSA members do to support their members and employees

I hope you have all had some time to rest and reflect over the summer, be it at home or abroad. I'm not sure how restful it felt but it was certainly nice to see some sunshine! As the summer draws to a close, we can start to plan ahead for some busy months, with Party Conferences, the Autumn Statement and COP28 to look forward to.

At the time of writing colleagues from the BSA, across the building society and credit union sectors and beyond, are fully immersed in planning for UK Savings Week - the campaign which aims to raise awareness of the benefits of saving and encourage people to foster better savings habits. This year UK Savings Week launched a savings challenge and invited the nation to get involved – Set a goal, Make it a habit, Reward yourself. With around 11.5 million people in the UK who have less than £100 of savings to fall back on in an emergency, building financial resilience can help provide some protection for future shocks.

Savings and financial resiliency is where the focus of much of this edition lies – on page 4 we hear about the goals of this year's campaign, together with the results of some new research which helped shape it. BSA CEO Robin Fieth highlights the clear links between a savings habit, resilience, wellbeing and productivity on page 3, and explains why we are calling for a future government to require major employers to offer workplace savings schemes.

Continuing the savings focus, articles from Yorkshire Building Society, Newcastle Strategic Solutions, Coventry Building Society and Family Building Society all take a look at different angles of the challenge to get the nation savings – from Yorkshire's Saving the Nation report; to Newcastle Strategic Solutions take on the ongoing transformation of the savings market; to a more personal view of the savings journey from Family BS (pages 5-8).



Financial resiliency is just one part of overall wellbeing and the second half of this edition talks all things employee wellbeing. A key focus for many employers post-Covid, employee wellbeing includes many angles such as health, finance, lifestyle and good management and leadership. We hear from a number of members, keen to share the work they are doing to support their employees. Building societies have always worked together, where appropriate, to ensure the mutual sector remains strong and relevant, and there is certainly much to learn from each other in terms of good practice – we hear from Leek, Leeds, Saffron and West Brom Building Societies on pages 10-13.

On page 14 BSA Associate, Miles Advisory, take a slightly different approach to the subject, explaining how employers can use purpose as a wellbeing strategy; and finally we hear from Parliament Hill about the tactical use of member benefits to aid engagement and retention of building society members. Much to digest and, hopefully, learn from. Enjoy!

Financial security and wellbeing



By **ROBIN FIETH**,
BSA Chief Executive

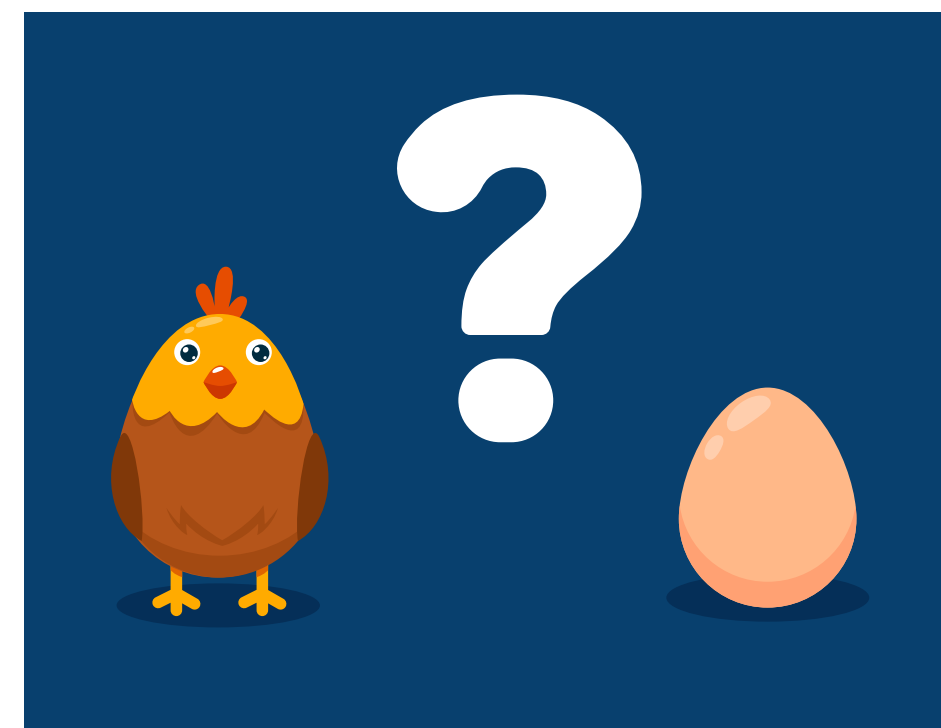
Not widely reported at the time, but for me one of the sadnesses of the post financial crisis period was the closure (and solvent wind-down) of Airdrie Savings Bank, the last of a proud line of UK savings banks that started a little way further south (but still in Scotland) with the establishment of the Ruthwell Savings Bank in 1810.

The local minister in Ruthwell, Rev Henry Duncan, is said to have been deeply concerned by the dire poverty of his parishioners and "aimed to encourage saving among the labouring classes to keep them from the degradation of poor relief".¹ Not so different in some ways from the tradition of building societies that started in Birmingham some 35 years earlier.

Winding forward to 2017, research by Toynbee Hall found that² "small sum savings can help individuals to develop greater financial resilience". Their question was whether "formulating a savings behaviour through informal or small sum savings is any more useful than just simply having a pot of money towards improving financial resilience". And the research found that "having such a savings behaviour can assist not only in an individual's having a precautionary sum of money, but also in knowing how best to deal with difficult financial situations".

With that we have the answer to the chicken and egg question that is sometimes raised about whether savings should come first, or whether financial education is a prerequisite: both at the same time!

The same report found that whilst 24% of households had no savings whatsoever (a number that does not seem to have improved much in the interim), about 20% of those in the bottom decile of income distribution did manage to save something. And that those savings were something of a status symbol – "many low income savers are motivated to save because having savings is a positive thing in itself".



Clear links then, between establishing savings habits, financial resilience and wellbeing. Links that were taken a step further by Yorkshire Building Society in its 2019 report on Using the Workplace to Get Britain Saving³ – making the connection between financial resilience, well-being and workplace productivity.

If ever there was a virtuous circle, this relationship between a savings habit, resilience, wellbeing and productivity seems to be an obvious one. But it is also one that many

have tried to foster without achieving a real breakthrough. Here we have a potential meeting of individual, corporate and national interest; and that is why in the Mutuals Prospectus, we are calling for a future government to require major employers to offer workplace savings schemes through payroll deduction. Our credit union members (and some of our building society members too) have demonstrated how effective regular payroll savings can be – so let's work together to make it happen at scale.

¹ www.natwestgroup.com/heritage/companies/ruthwell-savings-bank.html

² Toynbee Hall (2017) Savings for the Future: Solving the Savings Puzzle for Low Income Households

³ Yorkshire Building Society (2019) Using the Workplace to Get Britain Saving: being ambitious about saving



By **ANDREW GALL**,
Head of Savings & Economics,
BSA



UK Savings Week

– taking on the savings challenge

We all know that saving money is a great idea. Having a little set aside for a rainy day, to pay for a holiday, or simply to provide financial freedom to make the most of the opportunities in life makes sense.

But let's be honest, saving money is tough, and just thinking about it can be daunting for many. UK Savings Week is on a mission to change this by making savings simple, easy and rewarding.

Last year, over 70 organisations, including building societies, credit unions and charities, came together to launch the first UK Savings Week.

For the 2023 UK Savings Week, we wanted to build on the awareness created last year and to start driving real change amongst consumers. To do this, it was important that we created something that encouraged active participation, which extended beyond the seven days of the campaign, and that would ultimately change consumer behaviour.

It was also important that we remained sensitive to the impact the cost of living is having on personal finances. So alongside reaching the audiences who are able to engage with their savings, we needed to ensure that nobody felt judged or excluded from the campaign.

Current savings habits

We commissioned new research to check how much people generally have in savings, if people are able to save regularly, if they could save more than they currently do and to see how many people check if their savings are working as well as they could be for them.

The results revealed that over a third are holding most of their savings in a current account, potentially sacrificing around £1,000 extra income a year!

We also identified that 79% of savers are confident they could save more each month. Even more encouraging was that over a third of adults who currently have no savings at all are confident they could start saving something every month.

Armed with these statistics, we knew that our campaign needed to be around helping people to start, and stick to, good savings habits.

#takethesavingschallenge






The central theme for the campaign was a challenge inviting the nation to get involved by following three simple steps:

- 1. Set a goal** – encourage people to review their finances and set a target amount to save each month
- 2. Make it a habit** – set up a routine to save and check in on your accounts
- 3. Reward yourself** – to stay motivated, rewards along the way are important

The campaign was promoted through traditional and social media, using '#takethesavingschallenge'. By signing up for the challenge individuals will receive a monthly newsletter for the next year, which will include tips and suggestions for boosting their savings, alongside exclusive lifestyle content from our UK Savings Week ambassadors.

Almost 100 organisations supported UK Savings Week 2023. They have used the campaign assets in their marketing, launched collaborations with local money charities, delivered financial education lessons, and done a variety of other innovative activities to get the message across.

Ambassadors:

 Max Whitlock OBE Team GB 3x Olympic Gold Medallist <i>maxwhitlock</i>	 Benjamin Ebuehi Great British Bake off Star <i>bakedbybenji</i>	 Tom Leonard The Drag Queen Gardener <i>dragqueen_gardener</i>	 Steph Parker BigWorldSmallPockets Shoestring Adventure Guru <i>bigworldsmallpocketsk</i>	 Isa Welly Wellbeing & Fitness Coach <i>isawelly</i>
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Next Steps

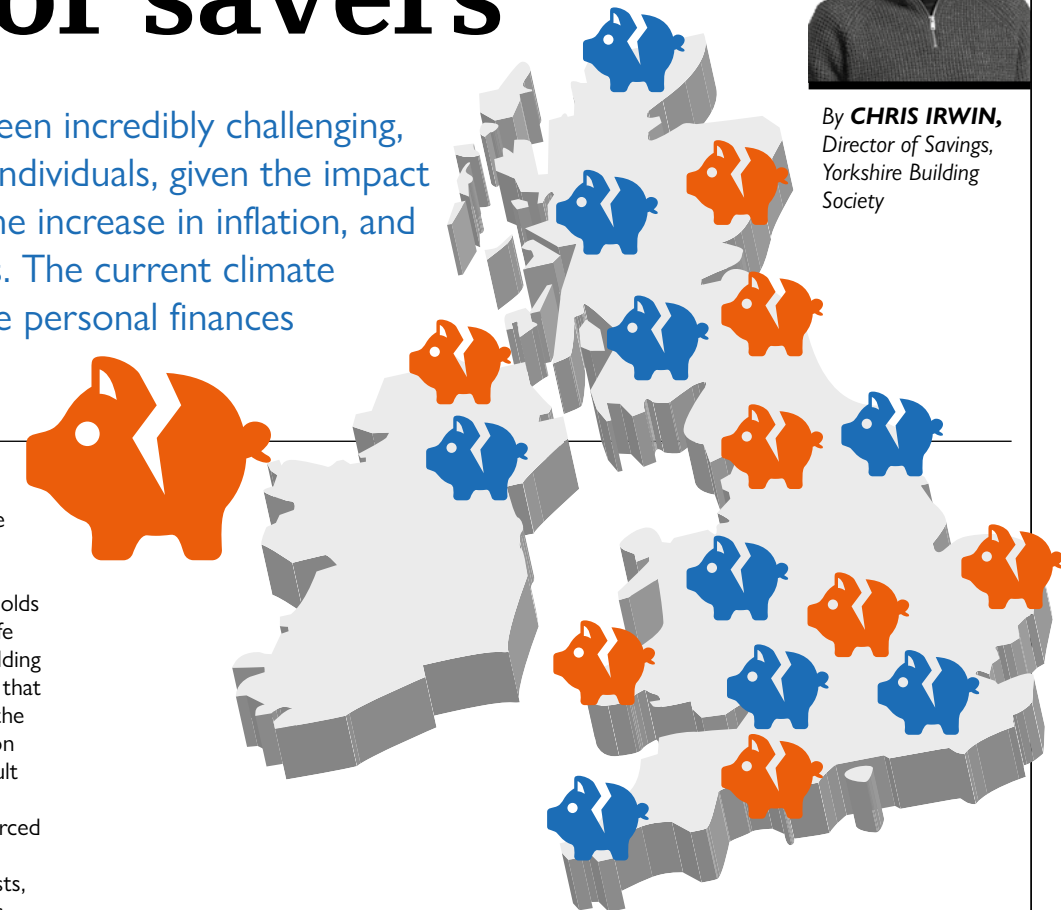
Want to get involved in UK Savings Week 2024 – get in touch now! uksavingsweek.co.uk



By **CHRIS IRWIN**,
Director of Savings,
Yorkshire Building Society

Making the UK a nation of savers

The last few years have been incredibly challenging, both for the UK and for individuals, given the impact of the global pandemic, the increase in inflation, and rapid rise in interest rates. The current climate has highlighted how fragile personal finances are across the nation.



The ability and willingness to save is critical in addressing financial resilience of individuals and the wider economy, helping households weather any emergency and fund future life goals. Recent research from Yorkshire Building Society (YBS), highlights worrying findings that debt has risen notably since the onset of the cost-of-living crisis, with the average person going a further £526 into the red as a result of rising utility, food and mortgage costs. Without savings, those families that are forced to fund day-to-day expenses by relying on personal credit will face a multitude of costs, including impact on their mental as well as financial health.

“With the cost of living hitting people hard, it’s crucial that everyone can access support and advice when it is most needed.”

It’s clear that for a growing number of households, the last five years of economic turmoil has made saving even the smallest amount impossible. Our Saving the Nation report highlights this with the number of people unable to save on a regular basis doubling to more than one in five (22%) UK adults, from one in ten (12%) in 2019.

The findings also underline the widening of the UK’s financial wellbeing gap – the gap between non-savers and savers – with those able to save regularly there are signs of increased savings activity in light of the coronavirus pandemic, with many people seeing their savings grow under lockdown restrictions. The average Brit said they increased the amount they can save each month by almost £100, to £256 from £161 in 2019.

Over the longer-term, the key to increasing household financial resilience is the building of a regular savings habit.

You might say as an organisation who look after millions of peoples’ savings it’s in our interest to support this and you’d be right, but only because we think it’s in everyone’s interests that more people save.

As a country we must adapt and look beyond savings solely as a means of making those who are already comfortably off even better off, and think of it as a natural thing for everyone to do when they can afford it. So, in times like these, people have a much-needed emergency buffer to fall back on.

That means supporting those who are struggling the most at the moment. With the cost of living hitting people hard, it’s also crucial that everyone can access support and advice when it is most needed. The expansion of YBS’s partnership with Citizens Advice, providing advice services in many of our branches to the public, is giving real help to those in need.

As well as improving access to information and encouraging people to form a new habit,

strengthening financial capability and education is just as important. We know that learning how to effectively manage finances is a crucial life skill. That means starting with our future generations, to equip young people with the skills to manage money. YBS supports children’s financial education through its Money Minds programme aimed at young people aged five to 19, through sessions in its branches and via an online programme.

We’re committed to getting the UK saving. We want other businesses, Government and non-savers everywhere to make sure saving isn’t just a one-off, but an established good habit making people healthier, more productive and more resilient to future opportunities and challenges.

Next Steps

Yorkshire Building Society has a range of support tools available to help people build their financial resilience and take practical steps to saving more. To find out more, please visit the Society’s website www.ybs.co.uk. The full Saving the Nation report can be found here www.ybs.co.uk/w/news/saving-the-nation



By **JONATHAN WILSON**,
Senior Savings Manager,
Coventry Building Society



Your first steps to saving smart

UK Savings Week, encourages people to develop sustainable savings habits and make the most of their money. Saving is a simple and essential skill for managing both your finances and your life, ensuring that you're not only covered for unexpected outgoings like one-off bills or replacing lost or broken items, but also that you're on track to save for the things that matter to you, like a family holiday or a new car.

Worryingly, 34% of UK adults have less than £1,000 in a savings account.¹ By analysing Bank of England data, we also found that 21% of household savings, totalling a staggering £268 billion, is being held in zero-interest, instant access accounts. With savings rates rising steadily over the past couple of years, savers could now be missing out on hundreds of pounds a year in extra returns from their savings.

Here's how to start your savings story and make your money work harder.

Creating a savings habit

A savings account is a secure and safe place to keep your money. While some people find it easier to adopt savings behaviours than others, the good news is that the 'savings habit' is something that can be learned.

Whatever amount you can afford to start saving right now, don't worry, it's never too low. In fact, new savers often have greater success when starting with small, realistic deposits.

Taking a little time to work out your own personal budget could help you arrive at a realistic monthly amount to set aside; it's just a question of figuring out how much money you have coming in each month, and how much you have going

out. Some of the amount you have left over could be used to start saving for some of those bigger or unexpected costs in the future. It may seem difficult at first, but it gets easier with time and a savings pot of any size will give you more choices when you really need to use it. If you keep your personal goals in mind when you save, it can be exciting to track your progress and celebrate key milestones along the way.

How to optimise your savings

It's surprising to hear that nearly a quarter (23%) of savers don't check the interest rate before opening an account; this means that many households are missing out on competitive rates for no reason.

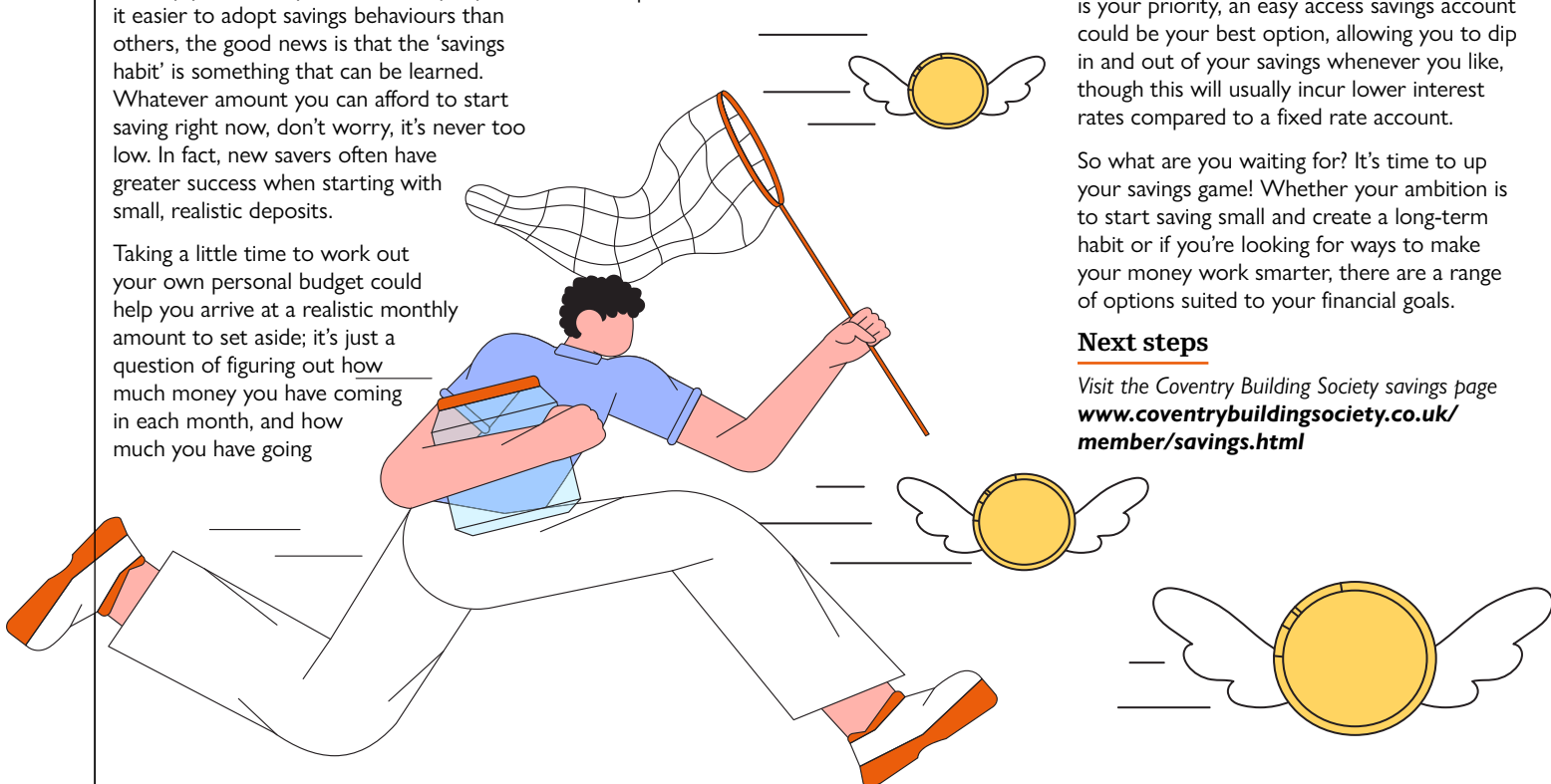
The key before picking a savings account is to first jot down your goals - short-term, long-term and everything in-between. If you're saving for something specific and special, be it a house deposit, a university fund, or a family holiday, opting for a fixed rate savings account could help your money work harder over time. These accounts usually ask that you lock away money for a year or two and the interest rate won't change.

If you're looking to grow your savings pot little and often whilst having some flexibility to access your savings, you should consider a regular saver account, which is designed for smaller amounts saved regularly in return for higher interest rates. But, if greater flexibility is your priority, an easy access savings account could be your best option, allowing you to dip in and out of your savings whenever you like, though this will usually incur lower interest rates compared to a fixed rate account.

So what are you waiting for? It's time to up your savings game! Whether your ambition is to start saving small and create a long-term habit or if you're looking for ways to make your money work smarter, there are a range of options suited to your financial goals.

Next steps

Visit the Coventry Building Society savings page www.coventrybuildingsociety.co.uk/member/savings.html



By **STUART MILLER**, Managing Director, Newcastle Strategic Solutions



Where to next? The ongoing transformation of the savings market



Following a benign retail savings market over the last decade, the UK savings landscape has transformed dramatically over the past 12 months begging the question, 'what next?'

Newcastle Strategic Solutions, the UK's leading savings management platform, managing over £40bn in balances on behalf of clients and their customers, has been helping clients enter the savings market and grow their operations since 2004. With best-buy rates changing almost on an intra-day basis over the past year, a key part of this has been helping navigate this new, fast paced retail market.

Given the dynamic nature of the current savings market, what are the opportunities for savings providers, and what trends are likely to shape the next 12-18 months?

First, a reality check. Inflation continues to squeeze household budgets and impact consumers' ability to save. But, after years of rock-bottom interest rates, consumers are starting to show positive savings habits, as higher rates and product innovations encourage savers to build a degree of financial security, and to look for the best deals.

Small businesses are also recognising the importance of making their cash balances work harder as they manage increasing costs.

For savings providers, it has been vital to build an understanding of the changing market dynamic in order to unlock growth.

With many people still sitting on savings amassed during the pandemic, and around £233bn savings balances currently in zero-

paying accounts, encouraging consumers to move their money to savings accounts, many of which are now paying well in excess of 5%, is a great opportunity for those looking to build their retail book.

Longer term, the transfer of wealth to younger consumers is a huge opportunity for savings providers: it's estimated that around £1trillion of assets will move hands before the end of 2027, with the majority shifting between generations as inheritance or gifts. But providers will need to consider how best to attract this type of consumer, versus a more traditional saver.

Another interesting trend is the growth of the 'subscription economy', and 'buy now pay later'. There is work to do to challenge a 'why save when I can buy it now?' attitude. If that's done well, and combined with innovative savings tools, providers can help their customers achieve their goals in a more sustainable way.

There is also a growing demand for green products and technology as individuals place greater importance on the environmental impact of their actions, including personal finances. Ethical savings options, especially when combined with strong account features, ease-of-use, and competitive rates, will be popular with younger adults ready to prioritise societal impact over financial returns.

We're also seeing small businesses seeking better returns from their funds, which

typically earn very low rates of interest with their current account provider. Our experience is that small businesses maintain larger average deposits than personal customers and are much less likely to move if they see the rate they are being paid as fair. This could be a good opportunity for established retail savings providers.

Finally, we should expect an increase in demand for the hyper-personal experience that customers are now used to from brands such as Spotify, Amazon, and Netflix. Financial services companies have lots of data, but need to use it better to get to know their customers and offer services that matter to them when they need it.

The market faces further uncertainty for the foreseeable future. At Newcastle Strategic Solutions we'll continue to monitor the latest market changes and trends, and work with clients to respond, benefitting them and their customers.

Next steps:

To find out how we can help you, phone and talk to our team: **0191 244 2121**, or email solutions@newcastle.co.uk



By **ALISTAIR NIMMO**,
Director of Marketing,
Family Building Society



The Savings Habit – a personal experience

Only those of a certain age will remember the classic blue Post Office savings book. In those analogue days it was made of real paper and when you made a deposit, somebody on a counter of your local post office would write in it by hand, using a pen with real ink, the amount you had deposited.

They would then stamp your book to make it official. This you would do using real coins or cash, or if you were feeling particularly flush, say after a birthday, with a couple of £1 notes. Later, as I progressed up the part time career ladder, and mixed student days with evenings working in the local pub, I opened an account with my local Bank of Scotland branch, because, like everyone else did then, I banked with the same bank as my parents.

Fast forward a couple of years and having graduated, I then found myself working in France for a UK holiday company, being paid in sterling directly into my UK current account but also making a reasonable living in Francs (remember those?), by organising weekly cheese and wine parties for guests. Building up savings in a current account didn't seem like a great idea even then, so I would write letters to my bank asking them to transfer funds from my current account to my savings account. Remember this was before the days of telephone banking, internet, and before mobile phones even... Yes I know, how did we exist?

We are now fully immersed in the 'digital age'.

I think of my previous financial experiences now when my 21-year-old son shows me the state of his S&P 500 tracker investments via his Hargreaves Lansdown app.

My point is, it has never been easier to save in one sense. The technology makes it easy. My son is lucky, as I continually remind him. He's working, living at home, doesn't

need to pay a 'proper' rent or have mortgage commitments. Dependents? Only his student girlfriend and VW Polo GTI, although maybe not in that order.

I don't need to convince him to save, but as we know from the research produced for UK Savings Week, he is in the minority. Our challenge is to persuade others who can afford it, even in a time of rising prices and increased mortgage costs, to allocate whatever they can to a saving strategy.

We know that some simply cannot afford to save. UK Savings Week understands that.

However, there are those who could put something away each month. The amount doesn't matter. It's the principal that counts. As I say, the technology today makes it easy. Set up a direct debit or use an app to monitor spending and 'sweep' any surplus each month into a savings account. Monitoring best savings account rates to get the best return is easy too. There are a whole host of platforms and forums which provide that information in an instant.

Back to my son, he has also set up a direct debit to a savings account. Occasionally he will moan about having to pay for a car service and how it has left him short. I will casually suggest that he uses his savings. He looks aghast at me. Why? Because his greater goal is saving for a house deposit, so he is willing to be short in a month in order to keep on track for his greater goal.

And that's the point of Savings Week. Having a goal, completing it and being rewarded for your efforts. This and building resilience to unexpected events is exactly what UK Savings Week is about, and this is where we, as mutual building societies, can collectively offer the opportunity to promote the savings habit and the rewards it will bring for the benefit of all of our members.

Next steps:

To find out more, visit our website - www.familybuildingsociety.co.uk/savings. Our Savings Calculator lets you see how you could make your money go further or reach a goal - familybuildingsociety.co.uk/savings-calculator



By **LOUISE THORNBURY**,
Head of HR &
Finance, BSA

A focus on fostering good employee wellbeing within the building society sector

In this section of Society Matters, we explore employee wellbeing from a variety of angles such as health (physical and mental), finance, lifestyle and good management and leadership. We are grateful to those member societies who have shared details of their organisation's employee wellbeing initiatives including financial support, menopause support and guidance, mental health awareness sessions and the provision of wellbeing hubs and calendar events.

Also included is an insight from Miles Advisory that covers how to create a culture to improve wellbeing, engagement and organisational performance, and the results of a recent BSA survey on approaches to employee wellbeing within the sector.

The Covid pandemic presented unprecedented challenges and changes to the way that we work. Initially employers concentrated on homeworking, hybrid working and supporting good mental health. However, more recently we have significantly developed our approach to workplace health and wellbeing, with organisations adopting a holistic approach to their employees' wellbeing, embedding it in its culture, leadership and people management. According to the BSA's survey, 76% of participants have, or are considering having, a documented employee wellbeing strategy and have a dedicated budget to deliver it.

Fostering good staff wellbeing is good for both organisations and their employees. Promoting wellbeing is linked to a healthier and more inclusive culture and creates a positive working environment where employees and organisations thrive with higher levels of staff retention, engagement, satisfaction and productivity. A good employee wellbeing strategy will also attract more potential new recruits which, in a scarce employment market, is crucial.

In light of the cost-of-living crisis, managing financial wellbeing is understandably more frequently being included in wellbeing strategies although, according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), it is still the least common area included in employee wellbeing strategies. There are many ways in which an organisation can support its employees' financial wellbeing beyond just paying employees a fair salary. In addition to monetary incentives, initiatives can include signposting to sources of



reliable and impartial financial information and guidance, offering flexible benefits to give choice about total reward packages and providing opportunities to discuss money issues.

The BSA's wellbeing survey revealed that 76% of participants provide their employees with access to financial wellbeing advice and support and 81% are accredited to, or are considering being accredited to, the Real Living Wage Foundation. 81% also provided their employees with cost-of-living payments in 2022. Furthermore, 29% of participants already have a Workplace Savings Scheme in place with a further 14% currently considering the provision of a scheme. Interestingly, only 10% currently offer a Workplace Loan Scheme.

Employers can better understand the needs of their workforce through regular employee surveys and forums (including wellbeing hubs) which are non-costly endeavours that offer open and non-judgemental ways of communication.

The use of Wellbeing Champions is also a great way to gauge feedback on what employees think about the wellbeing programme. According to the BSA's survey, 67% of participants obtain feedback on their wellbeing initiatives annually, with 38% carrying out regular temperature check surveys.

It's important for employers to understand the needs of their own workforce – there is no one size fits all solution to wellbeing. An effective employee wellness strategy should be based on the unique needs and characteristics of the organisation and its workforce, and should be regularly and robustly reviewed to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

Next steps:

Find out more, visit here for the BSA members survey, www.bsa.org.uk/statistics/sector-info-performance/wellbeing-survey-for-bsa-members



By **LIZZIE HALL**,
Head of HR, Leek Building Society



A renewed focus on financial wellbeing

Leek Building Society is a growing, mid-sized building society based in Staffordshire, with in excess of £1 billion in assets.

While highly committed to the virtues of its mutual status, this 160-year-old organisation has been seeking to become more modern in order to remain relevant in today's fast-moving financial services world. Investment in technology and expansion of product set represent part of this journey but more than anything, the Leek has identified the pivotal power of its people and the importance of their wellbeing.

Why focus on financial wellbeing?

Over the last two years there have been significant external challenges to negotiate – changing work expectations, and the cost-of-living crisis; all impacting people's ability to maintain positive financial wellbeing which is well known to be deeply interconnected to physical and mental wellbeing.

In response to these challenges, the Society has a holistic approach to wellbeing with a clear focus on financial wellbeing alongside physical and mental wellbeing.

Financial wellbeing takes centre stage

Leek Building Society has a clear purpose, which includes making a positive difference to the lives of its staff. Driven by this purpose, and in recognition of the cost-of-living crisis, Leek Building Society took steps to promote financial wellbeing:

- Incentivised workplace savings scheme to encourage savings behaviour by employees who can save as little or as much as they like from their monthly net pay
- Fair and equitable pay system, demonstrated by initiatives including signing up to the Living Wage Foundation and a generous cost-of-living increase to salaries, weighted towards lower-paid staff and backdated one year to provide a welcome lump sum for everyone.
- Effective pensions and retirement planning, including an uplift in the employer contribution to the occupational pension plan from 6% to 7.5%, without requiring an increase in staff contributions

- Supportive occupational sick pay, with full pay for six months for significant health conditions
- A review of maternity, paternity and adoption pay, resulting in two weeks' full pay for paternity leave in addition to two weeks' statutory, along with a considerable uplift in maternity and adoption pay (to 13 weeks at full pay, 13 weeks' half pay and 13 weeks' statutory).

What has the impact been?

For performance benefits, total assets reached a landmark achievement of £1.24 billion in 2022, and record gross mortgage lending of £186.2 million. However, as a purpose-driven mutual, the Society is about more than financials and in 2022 had 98% customer satisfaction, 97% staff satisfaction and achieved the top quartile in risk standards – our best ever levels. Further positive impacts flowing from the holistic wellbeing approach and the deep commitment to financial wellbeing are:

- In the most recent staff survey, 92% said "the Society cares for its staff more than most organisations they know", and 97% said "the Society's actions with remuneration and reward show it cares about me and my family".
- Staff attrition has remained low.
- Retention of key employees remains high at 95%.
- The organisation's culture continues to hold its exemplary status based upon staff survey and independent assessments.
- Customer satisfaction scores are overwhelmingly positive, with the Society being crowned Best Building Society at the 2023 British Bank Awards.
- The Society was recognised as Staffordshire's 2023 Employer of the Year.

Next steps

View the Leek Building Society CIPD case study www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/case-studies/supporting-employee-financial-wellbeing-leek-building-society/



By **KATE FISHER**, Director of Culture and Learning, Leeds Building Society



Creating an open and supportive environment to help remove the stigma around the menopause

In Japan the word for menopause is 'Konenki' which means 'renewal of life'. It's a period which is celebrated and seen as empowering, in stark contrast to how Western society has traditionally viewed this natural occurrence.

The stigma around menopause, its symptoms and their impact is gradually improving. Research advances and high-profile media campaigns have increased openness for individuals to share about their experiences.

Two years ago the Society joined these conversations and trained a team of Menopause Champions, female and male volunteers of all ages, from office and branch roles across the business.

About 60% of the Society workforce will experience menopause at some time in their life and roughly three in 10 of these employees are currently in menopausal age range. That's a sizeable proportion of colleagues likely to be directly affected by symptoms which can have an impact on their daily lives and those of the people around them.

Bearing in mind over three-quarters of those who experience menopause will have symptoms, the impact on them personally and professionally can't be understated:

- Menopause is a natural part of the ageing process, usually occurring between 45 and 55, although it can happen decades earlier or as late as the mid-60s. The average age is 51.
- Menopause is when menstruation ends (defined as 12 months having passed since the last cycle). Perimenopause is the time leading up to this, which is what most people probably refer to as 'the menopause'.
- Fluctuating hormone levels during perimenopause can cause more than 30 recognised symptoms, ranging from physical (eg hot flushes, fatigue) to mental ("brain fog", concentration problems) and psychological (anxiety, loss of confidence).
- Seven years is the average time symptoms last but one in three experience symptoms for longer.

- One in four will consider leaving their job due to struggles with menopause symptoms and 30% take sick leave.*
- Nearly two-thirds said they were less able to concentrate and more than half said they experience more stress.*

(*Source: CIPD)

Aiming to create a more open and comfortable environment around this topic, the Society's dozen Menopause Champions offer a listening ear and can direct colleagues to resources the Society offers, as well as external sources of help and information.

Over the past two years, colleagues have shared personal stories of their menopause symptoms, creating a safe space for conversations where others can learn more to better understand and support friends and loved ones when they might be struggling.

The launch of Menopause Champions followed work by the Society's Gender Equality Diversity Forum, one of the well-supported colleague groups helping to embed inclusive practices into everything we do. It's all part of our inclusion and diversity strategy 'Being You; Transforming Us', supporting our culture where everyone feels seen, valued and enabled to be at their best.

Since then, the business has hosted internal networking events and welcomed inspiring expert speakers. Guidance for managers includes details of workplace adjustments and a form was created to log symptoms, which can be useful evidence when seeking the right medical treatments or therapies. Period products are supplied free across all Society sites and seat pads are available to colleagues who are experiencing heavy periods.

All colleagues also have free access to the Peppy digital health app, with focused support specifically on menopause. This was introduced as an additional benefit to the existing Colleague Assistance programme, which already offered free advice and support 24-7, including access to counselling and medical specialists.

Next steps:

To find out more about the Society's Menopause Champions scheme, contact Diversity Manager Katie Wynn at kwynn@leedsbuildingsociety.co.uk World Menopause Awareness Day takes place each year on 18 October – more details here www.imsociety.org/education/world-menopause-day/.

"One in four will consider leaving their job due to struggles with menopause symptoms and 30% take sick leave."





By **KERRY BLOWS**, Senior People Business Partner



By **RACHEL TILLBROOK**, People Advisor, Saffron Building Society

Wellbeing Matters at Saffron



At Saffron, colleagues tell us that they want to feel heard, supported, and safe at work. The Saffron Wellbeing Initiative has been aiming to provide this peace of mind across the employee lifecycle. Internal evidence shows it's an investment of time and resources that is highly valued in the current climate. Kerry and Rachel from Saffron's People Team share some of the initiative's highlights that really make a difference.



Guest speakers at all-Society meetings

Each week at Saffron there is an All-Society Teams Call, hosted by our CEO. Alongside business updates, we regularly invite guest speakers to talk about their area of wellbeing expertise.

We recently heard from Joyce Harper, Professor of Reproductive Science at UCL's Institute for Women's Health. Her session highlighted that having a good understanding and encouraging open conversations about reproductive health at work is key to mental health and general wellbeing. Following her session, we introduced free sanitary products in all our Branches and Head Office for all colleagues to demonstrate our commitment in this space.

We've also heard from Kellie Maloney, who joined us to raise awareness for Transgender Awareness month. Kellie shared an insight into her life, from being the most famous boxing promoter in the world to learning to embrace her identity and show the world her true self.

People Manager Mental Health Sessions

We run regular Mental Health Sessions for all People Managers, hosted by Mental Health First Aid England. These provide

People Managers with the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to have wellbeing conversations with colleagues. No topic is off limits, and we've covered issues such as fertility and bereavement, which we know can affect performance and happiness at work.

Furthermore, we know that male colleagues often struggle to ask for help and we believe it's important to allow them the time and space to do this. Therefore twice a year we hold male-only mental health drop-in sessions hosted by our male mental health first aiders. It's a relaxed and open environment that our male colleagues tell us is highly valuable to them.

Menopause support

We started our commitment to enhanced menopause support by celebrating World Menopause Day with an event attended by over 40 of our colleagues where we highlighted the challenges of the menopause and opened up conversations about what support colleagues would like.

We then created a menopause policy to ensure it was handled consistently across the Society and created guidance and training for our People Managers. The support we offers varies from the small measures (e.g. a desk fan) to the big asks (changes in working patterns). We also have a team of menopause champions

who host quarterly drop-in sessions for those wanting to talk or ask for help or advice.

Financial wellbeing support

It's wrongly assumed that people working in financial services feel confident about their own money. We know this isn't always the case, so have partnered with The Money Charity to host a series of sessions going 'back to basics' to cover vital areas such as budgeting, borrowing & debt.

Constant feedback

Crucially, we regularly seek feedback on our wellbeing initiative to see what colleagues really value. It's not a static scheme but an evolving demonstration that we listen to what people need, signposting to more professional support when necessary, and show we care in small but tangible ways.

Most importantly, wellbeing isn't about making a business look good or ticking a box, it's about genuine support that our colleagues can see in action. In turn, this drives greater engagement with colleagues and better understanding within teams of the challenges each of us have.

Next steps:

Visit <https://www.saffronbs.co.uk/about>



By **SOPHIE PAZZAGLIA**, Chief People Officer, West Brom Building Society

Shining a spotlight on employee wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of employees has long been a crucial element of doing business, yet it was arguably the onset of the pandemic that really shone the spotlight on the importance of supporting all aspects of employee wellbeing in the workplace.



As a mutual, the West Brom has placed people at its heart since its inception almost 175 years ago, and whilst the ways in which we support our colleagues have inevitably changed over this time, the fundamentals remain the same. Healthy and happy employees are paramount to our success and by taking a holistic approach, we can support them across all aspects of physical, mental and financial wellbeing.

The outbreak of Covid-19 reinforced the importance of adapting employee wellbeing in response to the external environment, an approach we have long taken. The pandemic clearly placed an emphasis on supporting not only the physical health of our people, but also their mental health, given the overwhelming uncertainty we all experienced during that time.

However, with the pandemic now largely behind us, we've instead been dealing with a new set of challenges in the form of the cost of living crisis. This has drawn our attention to supporting financial wellbeing – a particularly pertinent focus given our position as a mutual organisation and our overarching purpose.

I'm incredibly proud that the West Brom became the first building society in the country, and the first business in the West Midlands, to receive the Real Living Hours accreditation. This means that we won't give people a contract that goes below the number of hours they need to earn a decent

living, including our third-party contractors working on site, and we hope that we will be joined by many other firms in making this commitment.

We were also recently awarded with the 'Beyond the Living Wage' accolade at this year's Living Wage Champion Awards, with the ceremony recognising businesses that hold the highest standard of employment practices and those that go above and beyond the basics of the Living Wage accreditation.

The cost of living crisis has made us acutely aware of the financial pressures that many people are facing and, driven by our values, we took the decision to help our people as much as we could. We gave colleagues earning below £35,000 (on a full-time equivalent salary), a one-off support payment of £1,200 in the hope it would go some way to easing financial burdens over what has been a difficult period for many. We also relaunched our Financial Hardship Fund, which was originally set up in the early part of the last century, to provide a helping

hand to our colleagues who suddenly and unexpectedly find themselves in financial difficulty, to an extent that their wellbeing would be significantly impacted. The fact that this Fund had remained largely dormant for many decades underpins the extent of the cost of living crisis.

We firmly believe that our people are our greatest asset and therefore doing the right thing for them, whatever the external circumstances might be, is incredibly important to us. Whether our employees have been with us for 30 years or 3 months, we want them to see the West Brom as a great place to work where they feel supported both professionally and personally at all stages of their career.

Next steps:

Find out more <https://www.westbrom.co.uk/about-us/news-and-media/news/2023/7/7/the-west-brom-wins-top-award-for-employment-practices>



By **DEBORAH COOPER** and **DEREK WYNNE**,
Partners of Miles Advisory



Creating a cause-based culture to improve wellbeing, engagement, and organisational performance.

Covid had unprecedented impact on the world of work. Post-pandemic, employee-centric focus on wellbeing is prioritised in a candidate driven market and with research reporting 59% of employees would consider a company with improved wellbeing benefits.

With early data indicating no change or uptick in productivity during the home-working phase of the pandemic, flexible work practices became a lynchpin in post-covid wellbeing strategies, with the introduction of hybrid, remote and location agonistic policies becoming a top three promise in the global Employee Value Propositions in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

In 2023 however, the war for talent is easing and the data is shifting, with research from The Economist suggesting that employees are up to 19% less productive working from home, and over 70% of organisations worldwide planning to mandate a return to the office.

And wellbeing remains poor. In the UK, the government believes that poor mental health is costing employers between £33bn and £42bn a year, and the UK economy as much as £99bn per year. So the potential shift away from flexible working as a panacea could be an opportunity to identify other effective wellbeing solutions as recognition grows that hybrid working can lead to a declining sense of belonging and purpose.

The link between engagement and performance outcomes – e.g. retention, productivity, safety, are well documented. Low engagement costs the global economy \$7.8 trillion - 11% of GDP globally. Presenteeism - employees not fully functioning in the workplace - costs US employers \$150 billion a year in lost productivity. Boredom was cited as a main contributor cited in 2021/22's 'Great Resignation'.

So, could 'Purpose' be the enabler in the hybrid world of work? If leaders can move the dial from people needing to work, to creating an environment where people want to work, they could create an employee experience to attract and energise the brightest and best.

Purpose driven organisations such as building societies have the competitive advantage - connecting everyone to a meaningful purpose providing the opportunity to do something that matters. Leaders can create a powerful employee value proposition that sets out what they can expect in return for their efforts. Few other sectors are in the same position when it comes to using purpose to paint a picture of how it will feel to be part of a cause and re-ignite a sense of belonging and

togetherness. The example set in the 'tone from the top' is critical to signpost and trigger wider organisational behaviour.

It is important to create a shared vision of the beliefs and attitudes and to support this with a clear benchmark of the expectations for their associated behaviours. By defining observable actions, leaders can hold each other to account; help employees understand the aspired culture; reduce misinterpretation of what good looks like in the way people work together and align ways of working with operating priorities.

Building societies are well placed to optimise this opportunity. The burning platform for change is only trumped by the opportunity that exists to build a compelling "cause-based" culture. The effective delivery of this will improve wellbeing, build engagement, and drive high performance. Regardless of whether the employee is at home at work, or at work at home.

Next steps:

Contact Deborah Cooper, Partner, **Deborah.cooper@miles-advisory 07464 675444**



By **ANDREW HOLDEN**,
Managing Director,
Parliament Hill



Tactical use of additional 'value add' to help achieve positive individual member outcomes

Building societies are adept at providing competitive and innovative products and services to help their members save, build financial resilience and have a place to call home.

However, no sustainable business can consistently sit at the top of the best buy list. But as consumers are becoming ever more proficient at comparing rates before they buy, and then switching to the next headline rate as soon as they're able, the increasingly competitive marketplace brings greater vulnerabilities for societies.

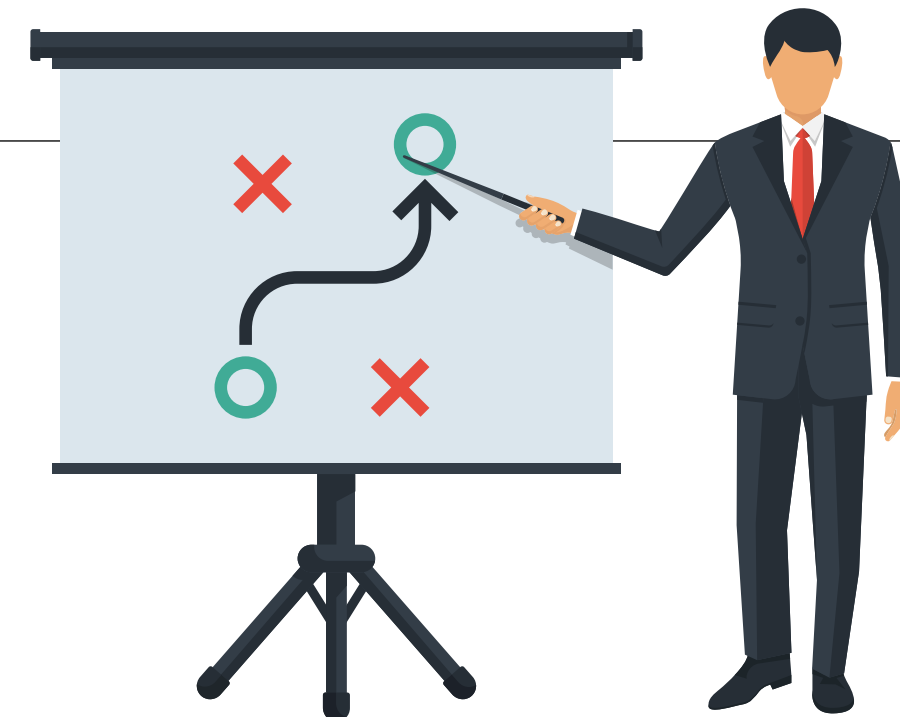
Increased intermediary involvement in the mortgage market, where customers remortgage as soon as it's viable, can interrupt the relationship between member and society. In the savings market, the loyal older (and often local) savers, who so often hold the most valuable balances, are gradually being replaced by younger cohorts, with a greater affinity to comparing and switching rather than loyalty. And as interest rates have risen, the value of switching becomes all the more worthwhile for the individual.

"Our members and employees benefit from the offers and discounts the member and employee reward scheme provides, regardless of where they live, online, in store and by telephone"
Newbury Building Society

What tactical action can societies take?

Fair value and the wider Consumer Duty mean tactical rate offers for all may no longer be feasible, meaning new ways of providing member value to savers and borrowers are needed.

One way to add further value across the board, and to bring about the ability to take tactical action, is through the use of 'member benefits'. These may include everyday savings for individual members, their families, and



even their businesses. It could be discounts on the weekly shop, or trips to the cinema, or buying a car. Or it could be a 24-7 GP helpline, a legal helpline or an IT support helpline.

Benefits and offers like these can be used (for example through the Parliament Hill 'savings calculator') to demonstrate how members can save hundreds of pounds every year. And they can be employed tactically to help achieve numerous outcomes, including attracting new members and increasing engagement, and therefore strengthening relationships, with existing members.

Benefits can be used to make the case for members who are considering leaving a society, to stay. Any perceived advantages elsewhere can be offset against the savings available within the benefits scheme. It may not always be necessary to make up all of the difference to a better rate elsewhere – we've heard of members with a 'mortgage tolerance' of £20pm, or others who would only cross the 'hassle threshold' of switching for a certain monthly gain. The value available through benefits can help to keep them under that threshold.

Improved CRM systems are enabling more effective use of data and segmentation. This can help to identify members approaching a point of vulnerability – e.g. product maturity. Promoting valuable benefits at anticipated points of vulnerability, should positively impact their decisions.

More strategically, in light of the current cost of living crisis, offering benefits such as described, including to the most vulnerable individuals above, could provide additional evidence to support the FCA's expectation that 'firms should be stepping up now to support customers in these straitened times'. They also demonstrate fair value in line with the requirements of the Consumer Duty.

Overall, this is a natural extension for building societies, an additional step in providing appropriate and relevant support to help their members, along with the opportunity to support wider CSR goals. And further differentiating mutuals from their plc competitors.

Next Steps:

Contact Andrew Holden **andrew@parliament-hill.co.uk**. Visit Parliament Hill **parliament-hill.co.uk/membership-engagement**

Dates for your diary

The BSA delivers a range of knowledge sharing and educational events that increase awareness of business issues and provide the tools and skills that industry professionals need to develop their roles. View the latest listings and register at www.bsa.org.uk/events



Audit, Risk & Regulation Autumn Series

This year's annual update returns in a brand new format with a series of topical webinars covering key areas of audit, risk and regulation. This series of events is targeted at risk and finance executives as well as non-executive members of Audit and Risk Committees. Each webinar will last approximately 90 minutes and include keynote presentations from leading industry experts, a range of panel discussions, and the opportunity to ask our panel questions in Q&A sessions.

For more details and to register your place visit the BSA website.
Cost: £99pp (VAT exempt) - BSA members & associates
 £150pp (VAT exempt) - Non-members
www.bsa.org.uk/auditseries

Preparing for Successful Regulatory Visits

21 & 22 November 2023 | Online

This online workshop, split over two half-day sessions, is especially helpful for those who have not yet experienced a regulatory visit or have a critical visit approaching and wish to hone their skills. It will help you know what to expect from such a visit, how to prepare effectively and how to have a positive effect on the outcome.

The course will look at current areas of regulatory focus and explore hot topics such as PRA expectations in managing operational resilience.

Cost: £495 (VAT exempt) - BSA members only
www.bsa.org.uk/reg-visits

Annual Update and Networking for Boards

29 November 2023 | London

This autumn, the BSA is running its first event designed specifically for Board Members (Exec and Non-Exec) and Board attendees. This in-person event will launch with a networking dinner hosted by the BSA on the evening of 28 November, with limited places available. The main event takes place at etc. venues Chancery Lane in London and has been constructed to offer plenty of networking opportunities.

The morning's highlight will be a keynote session led by HM Treasury, and we'll also consider and discuss the political and economic environment, as well as the trials and tribulations of regulating and being a regulated mutual today. The rest of the day will involve a series of practical interactive sessions and will conclude with a panel session looking ahead at the mortgage market in 2024 and beyond, before the event closes with networking drinks.

Cost: £385 (VAT exempt) - BSA members only
www.bsa.org.uk/Boards2023

Promoting your event via the BSA website

As well as advertising BSA events, BSA Associate members are able to advertise up to 5 of their own events per year free of charge, with registration and hosting managed independently of the BSA. Visit www.bsa.org.uk/AssociateAdvertising for more information.