

# Connect

The newsletter for West Brom members

Winter 2021

WE ARE THE  
**BEST  
BUILDING  
SOCIETY  
MORTGAGE  
PROVIDER**



**WINNER**

**Moneyfacts®  
Awards 2021**

**Best Building Society  
Mortgage Provider**

## Inside this issue

Bridging the Gap  
with Barnardo's

Moneyfacts Awards

Supporting our Customers

Half-Year Results

Helping mortgage prisoners

Our Sustainability Promise



# Bridging the Gap



We're proud to announce that the West Brom has partnered with children's charity Barnardo's, to support its mission to provide accommodation for vulnerable young people leaving the care system. Leaving home is a challenge for everyone, but young people leaving care often do so without the support of a loving family. Suitable accommodation plays a crucial part in the successful transition out of care, with many outcomes dependent on care leavers being able to access appropriate and sustainable options.

Over the next two years, the Society is looking to raise **£500,000** using the **Dormant Assets Scheme** to fund the development of four '**Gap Homes**' for young vulnerable people leaving the care system in the Black Country area. Barnardo's and the West Brom are in discussions with Sandwell Council to explore building the Gap Homes within the region. Gap Homes will be available to vulnerable young people for up to two years offering them a vital transitional step towards independent living, supported by Barnardo's staff.

As well as this, the Society will provide additional support such as financial education, internships and work placements for the young people resident in the new homes. We are also excited for our colleagues, to have the opportunity to participate in both fundraising and skills-based volunteering like financial mentoring and employability skills, and this partnership will enable us to positively impact the lives of the young people coming through the programme.



## Home sweet home fundraising

Colleagues were recently invited to a 'Back Together Brunch' event at the Society's head office, the first time many people had been back since the start of the pandemic.

To kick-start our fundraising for Barnardo's, we held our first bake sale. The scrumptious Victoria sponges and mouth-watering lemon drizzle, provided a stepping stone towards our fundraising target with **£260 raised!**



# THE SOCIETY WINS MULTIPLE MORTGAGE AWARDS

# 1



**Best Building Society  
Mortgage Provider**

The Society has been recognised in three categories in the Moneyfacts Awards 2021!

- **Winner of Best Building Society Mortgage Provider**
- **Highly Commended Best Fixed Rate Mortgage Provider**
- **Commended Innovation in Personal Finance for the Modified Affordability Proposition**

We are proud to be crowned the winner of the 'Best Building Society Mortgage Provider'. The award recognises our commitment to our Purpose and providing the best service to our customers.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic and the impact on the housing market, we worked even harder to provide the most competitive products to help our members, and in return we were highly commended in the 'Best Fixed Rate Mortgage Provider' category.

To be awarded 'Commended Innovation in Personal Finance for the Modified Affordability Proposition' is a great achievement. We are particularly proud of this award, as this is for the products we launched specifically for mortgage prisoners. It is a testament to the colleagues that worked on this project and were able to proceed with launch despite the challenges of the pandemic, and provide a genuine benefit to those borrowers. You can find out more about Modified Affordability on page 7.

James Wright, Divisional Director Marketing & Intermediary Distribution: "The recognition from the Moneyfacts Awards 2021 highlights the consistent hard work carried across the whole business, enabling us to provide competitive specialised products for the benefits of our members. When our members purchase their homes, it's more than just about the bricks and stones, it's the importance of their dream home becoming an affordable reality for them, and we've continued to support our members with good quality products and services despite the challenges of the past year."

M6 Junction 9 digital signage



# Supporting our Customers



It's fair to say that the past months have been difficult for everyone. We've been working hard across the Society during the pandemic to ensure we continue to offer the best possible service to all our customers. Our focus has been on providing frontline staff with the knowledge and skills required to meet the ever changing needs of our customers.

In the early days of the pandemic we quickly set up an easy way for customers to defer their mortgage payments (also known as a 'payment holiday'). This supported customers who found themselves with a reduction in their income and in total we helped 5,439 customers with this. 98% of those customers are now repaying.

We called customers who had previously let us know that they wanted additional support from us. We wanted to see how they were and let them know what services were still available during the lock-down periods.

We made sure our website was continually updated with support tools and advice, such as where to go for help with money worries or information about external charities and organisations. In addition:

- We introduced an **online form** on the **Support page** of our website so that customers can let us know about any additional support they might need.

- Our **live chat** option allows customers to chat with our Customer Services Agents (Monday to Friday) and can be accessed through the homepage of our website by clicking on the speech bubble icon in the bottom right hand corner.
- Our **send us a message** facility can be used by accessing the **contact us page** on our website.

There are also some simple ways that we help customers too:

- We can offer private rooms in our branches for appointments.
- Customers can ask a family member or friend to come with them when visiting a branch.
- When applying for a new product with us, customers can take the paperwork home with them to read over before committing to signing. There's no pressure to do it there and then.
- Those with a Textphone (also known as a Minicom) or computer/smart device with the appropriate software, can use the Relay UK service. This can assist customers who are deaf or have any difficulty with hearing or speech.
- It is also easy to change the size of the text and colour of the pages of our website to make things more clear.



### IEP Debt Code of Best Practice for Debt Collection and Recovery

We've become one of the first organisations to sign up to a Code of Best Practice for Debt Collection and Recovery. This has been set up by the Inclusive Economy Partnership with the aim of providing better and fairer debt collection practices. This is more important than ever given the impact of the pandemic and as well as becoming an official signatory of the code, the Society has a dedicated team to support customers in financial difficulty that can use a range of measures to help and support.

## We are Dementia Friends



Earlier in the year we partnered with **Alzheimer's UK** to deliver awareness sessions across our branch and head office teams to support our colleagues to become **Dementia Friends**.

The Dementia Friends programme is the UK's largest education initiative to transform people's awareness, insight and attitude about dementia. The campaign aims to alter people's perception of dementia and change the approach to this condition.

Being a Dementia Friend gives our colleagues the opportunity to put themselves in the shoes of people with dementia and understand how they, and the Society, can help our customers and the wider community.

We have extended our Dementia Friends awareness training so that more of our colleagues have the opportunity to become a Dementia Friend. We've also introduced interactive learning sessions for those who already have, to give them a deeper understanding.



## We are always here

If you would like more information or would like additional help and support from us, you can visit our website: **[www.westbrom.co.uk](http://www.westbrom.co.uk)** or you can call us on **0345 241 3784** if you wish to speak to us.

# A strong half-year performance

Thanks to the hard work of colleagues throughout this difficult period, we were able to report a strong half-year performance. Whilst we are optimistic about the economic outlook and better days are seemingly coming, there are still challenges ahead and we remain committed to delivering our Purpose through three guiding principles:

## 1. Prioritising the wellbeing of our members, colleagues and communities.



**Supporting the wellbeing of members, colleagues and communities has remained top of our priority list. Throughout the first half of the year we:**

- Have granted 14% of our residential mortgage borrowers with payment deferrals of which over 97% have been supported back into full payment status;
- Continued to provide tailored support and solutions for our members including vulnerable customers and mortgage prisoners;
- Rewarded savers by paying £8.8m more in interest than the market average<sup>1</sup>; and
- Progressed multiple fundraising and volunteering initiatives, including a new partnership with Barnados, for those causes hit hardest by the pandemic.

## 2. Ensuring our products, services and premises are safe and accessible.



**Given the challenges of the pandemic, providing products and services in a safe and accessible way has remained important. Throughout the first half of the year we have:**

- Extended an additional £479m (30 September 2020: £248m) of new residential mortgage lending including £123m (30 September 2020: £102m) to first-time buyers;
- Continued to raise awareness of mortgage prisoners and enhance our Modified Affordability proposition to make it more widely accessible;
- Received recognition in three categories of the Moneyfacts 2021 awards including Winner of Best Building Society Mortgage Provider, Highly Commended Best Fixed Rate Mortgage Provider and Commended Innovation in Personal Finance for the Modified Affordability proposition;
- Followed government guidance in keeping all of our 34 branches and head office site COVID-19 secure as the country emerged from lockdown; and
- Continued with remote working for over 80% of our staff and progressed our approach to hybrid working through feedback from our colleagues and the formation of a 'Hybrid Working Group'.

## 3. Remaining operationally and financially resilient.



**The successful transition of our operating model and responsible management of risk has delivered both operational and financial resilience. Throughout the first half of the year we have:**

- Continued to provide all essential services to members;
- Improved Net Promoter Score<sup>®2</sup> from +76 at March 2021 to +80, with customer satisfaction remaining strong at 96%;
- Maintained our financial strength with our CET 1 ratio at 16.3% (31 March 2021: 16.4%); and
- Reported a statutory profit before tax of £14.6m (30 September 2020: £2.9m).

<sup>1</sup> Average market rates sourced from Bank of England Bankstats table A6.1

<sup>2</sup> Net Promoter Score and NPS are trademarks of Satmetrix Systems, Inc., Bain & Company, Inc., and Fred Reichheld. The Net Promoter Score is a measure of how likely our customers are to recommend us.



# Helping mortgage prisoners

There has recently been a lot of press coverage about 'mortgage prisoners' and campaigns to help borrowers who are stuck paying higher interest rates. Here at the Society, we are at the forefront of the lenders that are committed to helping these borrowers with a variety of product options that enable them to switch to a more competitive rate.

You may be wondering 'what are mortgage prisoners?' Mortgage prisoners are borrowers who are with lenders that no longer actively offer new mortgage products and who, due to the stringent requirement on affordability tests introduced following the financial crash of 2008, have been unable to take advantage of lower-cost mortgage options.

We were the first lender in the UK to implement modified affordability rules in September 2020 and from this we have seen a steady stream of applications from borrowers, but we understand that more needs to be done to support mortgage prisoners.

We understand there have been very limited options available for mortgage prisoners and in order to help more of these borrowers, we have reviewed our current product range and have extended our support for mortgage prisoners with the introduction of new products up to 85% loan to value.

We've seen first-hand the substantial savings that mortgage prisoners can make, some borrowers that have switched to the West Brom have had savings up to £1,000 on their monthly mortgage payment. Whilst we're pleased with the borrowers we've helped so far, we've always acknowledged that as a mid-sized lender we can only do so much.

To qualify for the Society's modified affordability products, borrowers must be eligible under the FCA's Modified Affordability Assessment rules, which require, as a minimum, existing mortgage payments to have been made for a period of 12 months and there to be a no arrears position. The new mortgage must also be more affordable to the borrower by reducing the monthly payment to qualify for the products. If borrowers are uncertain of their position they should either contact their existing lender or administrator or go to the Money and Pensions Service's portal to find out more information.



**Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage. Terms, conditions and current lending policies apply.**



# Making a More Sustainable Society

Here at the Society, we have a duty of care for our customers, colleagues, and the environment. Below are the key targets of our environmental plan:

- Reduce carbon emissions year on year
- Reduce water usage year on year
- Zero to Landfill by 2022

A key part of our environmental plan is to reduce the Society's carbon footprint, and previously we had set ourselves the target of zero carbon emissions by 2035. Because of the great progress we have made, we're moving this target forward. Our target now is to be carbon neutral by 2025. We're confident we can achieve this and will continue to introduce other green initiatives to make sure our operations are as environmentally friendly as possible.

## Our Green Initiatives

We already have environmentally friendly initiatives in place to help reduce our carbon emissions:

### Energy

At the West Brom, we buy energy on fixed-term contracts and we have now committed to moving to Green energy. Following a thorough review, we have chosen SSE Green because:

- Electricity is 100% renewable generated by wind and hydro assets and is fully backed by Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin (REGOS).
- Gas is 100% renewable from sources such as agricultural materials, along with food and water. It is fully backed by Renewable Gas Guarantees of Origin (RGGOs) and Biomethane Certificates (BMC).

### Transport

In July 2020, the Society moved to Tusker. Tusker offers a large number of different electric cars available from superminis to vans, all of which are more environmentally friendly and by charging your car, it will be much cheaper than filling up with petrol or diesel.

We have replaced our existing pool cars with an electric car and also replaced the Facilities works van with an electric van.

### Waste and recycling

We have recycling points in each of the printer rooms and kitchenettes for colleagues to use.

We now print our marketing literature on paper that is made of responsibly sourced wood fibre and includes the Forest Stewardship Council's label/ accreditation where appropriate.

All our office depot paper has the EU Ecolabel and FSC logo, which means it is recycled paper from responsible sources. We also recycle all our printer toners in both the head office and the branches.



**Braille, audio and large print versions of this leaflet are available upon request. Please contact us on 0345 241 3784.**

Head Office: 2 Providence Place, West Bromwich B70 8AF  
[www.westbrom.co.uk](http://www.westbrom.co.uk)

Calls and electronic communications may be monitored and/or recorded for your security and may be used for training purposes.

Your confidentiality will be maintained. The West Brom is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and Prudential Regulation Authority. Register No. 104877.  
'the West Brom' is a trading name of West Bromwich Building Society.



When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it