



# Members' questions and comments for the Board - March 2022.

**Is the Suffolk Building Society going to go on line so I can see which accounts I have and move money about on line?**

Yes, the provision of online savings is absolutely a priority for us. Our aim is to provide members with a choice of how they interact with the Society. We need to ensure that any online offering is complementary to the current face-to-face experience we offer in branch. The digital offering and physical offering must function seamlessly. This is a huge undertaking and not one we will rush at the expense of member experience.

**Every year, members are asked to agree pay increases and benefits increases to already well-compensated board members. Every year, this is justified by stating that the Society needs to keep up with similar payments paid elsewhere. Surely this is just meaningless words? Every society appears to use similar justification for upping directors' benefits without any real evidence that the society would actually suffer otherwise. My question is: "Should directors refrain from accepting ALL forms of enhancing their own payments when members are struggling to make payments of all sorts of bills and the Society is unable to offer worthwhile and immediate increases of interest to savers?"**

The Society is required to pay an appropriate level of salary to attract the right quality of employee to run the Society for the benefit of its members. Our pay review decisions are always mindful of the external environment and are regularly benchmarked across the industry. The Society was one of the few societies to pass on the rate change in December and again in February.

**I am currently a 27 year old single man with a disability, currently saving for my own home. I have a Member Reward Saver ISA and I have noticed some places have a Help to Buy ISA's or equivalent and provide support for those saving particularly those with disabilities. Is Suffolk (formerly Ipswich) Building Society going to provide something similar? Also I would like to feedback to everyone in the Woodbridge Branch (my local one) is amazing and does a great job when I go in each month. As I work in the NHS, they do chat and ask how I am doing as I ask them as well and it makes my experience worth 20/10.**

Help to Buy ISAs are no longer available and the Society may consider offering the Lifetime ISA (LISA) as part of its online savings offering as the Society's account management systems do not currently have the functionality to operate a LISA. On the mortgage side the Society does offer mortgages to individuals with disabilities through our involvement in the Suffolk HOLD scheme, please do contact us if you think this could be of assistance.

**Could we take more people off zero hour contracts please by reducing the directors remuneration?**

**Thanks.**

The Society does not employ any staff on Zero Hours contracts. The Society pays the Real Living Wage to all employees. The Society pays an appropriate level of salary to attract the right quality of employee to run the Society for the benefit of its members.

**As a member of the society, am I a shareholder? Do I get dividend as an owner?**

The Society does not have shareholders. Our members are our owners. Membership means more than being a customer, and as a saver or a borrower you are part of our community. We want you to have your say on how the Society is run, to welcome you along to our exclusive events and to get involved with our sponsor partners.

**I am still very disappointed that there is no representative/branch in Felixstowe. I hope this will be reviewed in your future plans.**

As you are aware, in 2020, the Society made the careful decision to close our Felixstowe Agency. The majority of our members who used the service have continued to visit us at one of our other nearby branches, in particular Woodbridge or Ravenswood. It is unlikely that the Society will revisit the decision to reopen the agency, however we are committed to maintaining a face to face presence for our members. We continue to be open to ideas as to how that might be achieved in the future.

**Have the Board considered offering lifetime mortgages? If not do they believe it's a possibility going forward?**

The Society offers a wide range of later life mortgages, including lending to applicants into their retirement, lending to the retired and a specific Retirement Interest Only (RIO) mortgage. The Society does not have the regulatory permissions to offer lifetime mortgages and this would introduce new risks to the Society such as longevity risks which would need to be considered and managed. As such, at the current time the Society is not considering offering lifetime mortgages.

**I would like an update on the progress of online accounts.**

This remains a key priority for the Board and one of our corporate objectives. We are conscious of the need for an online service to respond to member requirements and needs. Our aim is to provide members with a choice of how they interact with the Society. We need to ensure that any online offering is complementary to the current face-to-face experience we offer in branch. The digital offering and physical offering must function seamlessly. This is a huge undertaking and not one we will rush at the expense of member experience.

**Do you offer over 80s fixed mortgage to reduce the inheritance tax on death?**

Thank you for your question which was submitted via the Society's general enquiries mailbox. We do offer 'later life' mortgages which can run up to age 95. We have robust controls in place for this type of lending to ensure that mortgages are appropriate and affordable and these include the requirement to take independent legal advice as well as financial advice.

**Why does it take 9 days for a cheque to clear after it has been paid in?**

Our Savings Terms and Conditions allow for 8 working days from the day the cheque is deposited to the date the money is available to draw. This is because as a Society we do not clear our own funds and rely on an agency relationship with our clearing bank, Barclays. The reason it takes longer than the generally accepted 3 days for a normal clearing bank is firstly, the operational process of sending cheques to Barclays, and secondly, an amount of time that is allowed for uncleared cheques. This process is in line with other building societies who rely on an agency arrangement. Note that there are other funds transfer arrangements that facilitate earlier availability of funds (debit cards for example), and our terms and conditions also confirm that interest on money deposited is credited to the account on the day the amount is deposited prior to when it is cleared and available.

**Why did you close the Woodbridge branch of the society? It is still listed as current on the ‘Suffolk Through and Through - Review of the year 2021’.**

The Society does still have a Woodbridge Branch. The address is 24 Thoroughfare, Woodbridge, IP12 1AQ. The Branch is open Monday to Friday 9:00 - 17:00 (with the exception of Wednesday when it opens at 9:30). It is also open on Saturday between 9:00 and 13:00. You can also speak to the Woodbridge branch directly by calling 01394 380 537.

**I belong to a much larger building society than the Suffolk Building Society. Their payments to board members are far lower than those paid to the directors of Suffolk.**

The Society is required to pay an appropriate level of salary to attract the right quality of employee to run the Society for the benefit of its members. Our pay review decisions are always mindful of the external environment and are regularly benchmarked across the industry.

**Having just received your Review of 2021, I would be really interested to know how the salaries of the staff relate to the so-called “compensation” (the term that financial types like to use, apparently, in contradistinction to a wage or a salary) that is awarded to members of the Board and senior staff, ie CEO etc. What are the highest and the lowest salaries that staff earn, together with the average? Also, what are the hourly rates? This information is surely not confidential or secret. Also does the Society use NDAs in cases of dispute? It is good to know that the staff received a salary uplift of 1.5%, last year, but what will happen in 2022 when the inflation rate is estimated to reach 7%?**

Thank you for your question which was submitted via the Society’s general enquiries mailbox. In response to your question, the basic salary of our CEO is £177.2k; all our employees (including Saturday employees and apprentices) receive at least the Real Living Wage. The basic salary ratio between our highest paid permanent member of staff and our lowest paid regular permanent member of staff is 9:1. We are not in a position to comment on future salary increases, as we will need to examine the environment at the time of making the decision. However, as noted above, the Society is committed to paying the Real Living Wage to all employees. This rate is calculated annually by the Resolution Foundation and overseen by the Living Wage Commission, based on the best available evidence about living standards in the UK at the time. The Society may use NDA’s if appropriate to do so.

**Why has the auditors report been subsumed with others for the vote, surely this is illegal?  
Why have new branches not been opened in areas where banks have withdrawn?**

The resolution is for members to receive the report of the Directors, Annual Account and Auditors Report. This is a valid resolution. In relation to your comment about additional branches, one of our core values is about being accessible and having real people available to help our members. We are pleased to have maintained our local presence through our 9 branches across the county, which has enabled us to continue to provide a local service to our members. We don't currently have plans to open additional branches but we do continually review this. At the same time, we are also focussed on developing our eSavings offering for members who prefer to manage some of their transactions online.

**Would the Board be willing to allow members to vote on the Society ending buy to let mortgages and mortgages on second homes?**

We don't intend to have a member vote on this subject. However, as part of the Society's commitment to the community and our mission to provide safe homes, we need to carefully balance our portfolio of mortgages. The Society believes that Buy to Let properties can provide a valuable source of safe homes for those who are not in a position to purchase their own property.

**When will you get into the 21st Century and have an online platform?**

This remains a key priority for the Board and one of our corporate objectives. We are conscious of the need for an online service to respond to member requirements and needs. Our aim is to provide members with a choice of how they interact with the Society. We need to ensure that any online offering is complementary to the current face-to-face experience we offer in branch. The digital offering and physical offering must function seamlessly. This is a huge undertaking and not one we will rush at the expense of member experience.

**How will Society be different in it's new form? Will members continue to be able to participate in community activities as we previously used to before Covid e.g. a fab visit to a blacksmith?**

The Society's name change acted as a catalyst for the Society to re-examine our mission, vision and values to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of our members. We are delighted to start to offer community events again, our first member event is happening next month and is a visit to a Suffolk Wildlife Trust site. You can find out more information about the event on our website.

**Suffolk**

**Building Society**

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