
Building Community

The Social Value of the Building
Society Branch Network

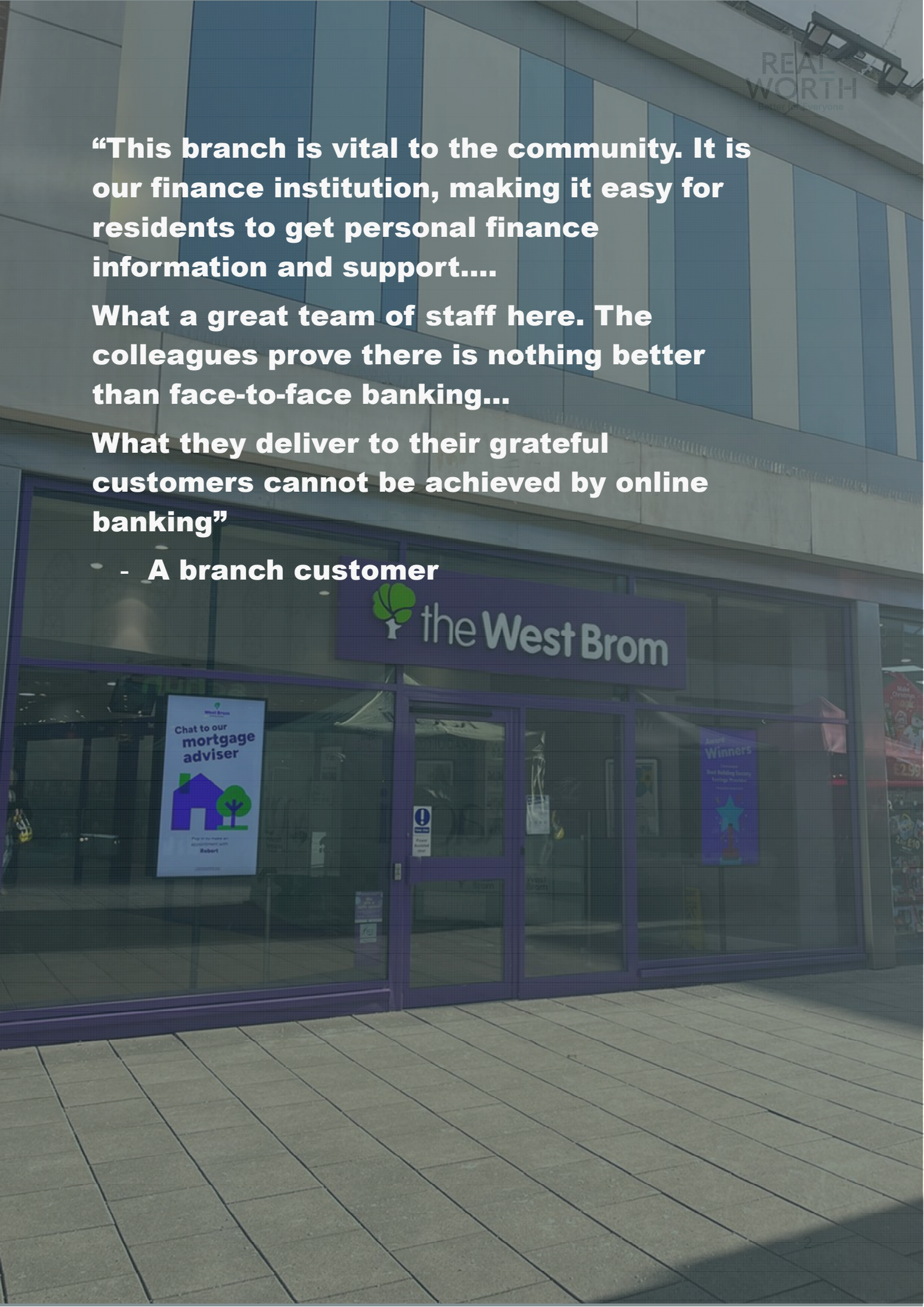


“This branch is vital to the community. It is our finance institution, making it easy for residents to get personal finance information and support....

What a great team of staff here. The colleagues prove there is nothing better than face-to-face banking...

What they deliver to their grateful customers cannot be achieved by online banking”

- A branch customer



Foreword

Building societies have always been about more than financial services. As customer-owned organisations, they help first-time buyers take their first step onto the housing ladder, support people through major life events, safeguard vulnerable customers and provide an important anchor for local high streets.

This report demonstrates the scale of the contribution made by building societies. It finds that building society branches generate £7.6 billion of social value, supporting financial wellbeing, protecting people from fraud, improving financial confidence and strengthening local communities.

Digital innovation will continue to transform financial services, bringing greater convenience and extending access for consumers. But progress should never come at the expense of inclusion. A modern financial system must combine the efficiency of digital services with access to trusted human support for those who need it, ensuring no one is left behind.

I welcome this report and its findings and recognise the contribution that building societies have made to financial inclusion, stronger communities and a more resilient economy, for the future.

Rachel Blake MP
Economic Secretary to the Treasury

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Acknowledgements

The study was conducted in partnership with eight building society organisations.



Introduction

Building society branches remain a visible part of high streets across the UK, yet their role is changing. As financial services become increasingly digital, and as commercial pressures reshape the banking landscape, decisions about the future of in-person services are often framed in terms of cost and efficiency. What is less frequently understood is the wider role branches play in people's lives and in the communities they serve.

The Social Benefits of Building Societies

For many customers, a branch is more than just a place to carry out transactions. It is where people go for financial guidance and support, to discuss plans such as buying a home, seek reassurance when something feels uncertain, and where staff notice early signs of vulnerability, confusion, or financial risk. Branches support people who are seeking confidence in financial decisions, are digitally excluded, and those managing complex life events such as bereavement or ill health.

They also act as local anchors, providing learning on key life skills, contributing to high street activity and supporting community initiatives.

The Need for Evaluation

Despite this, the social and wellbeing contribution of branches is rarely measured systematically. Existing discussions often focus on financial performance or service volumes, leaving a gap in evidence about the broader value created for customers and communities.

This is particularly relevant in a world where 6,600 bank and building society branches have closed since 2015, and increased digitisation has meant that 64% of our total transactions were online in 2024.¹

About This Report

The Building Societies Association commissioned RealWorth, a social value consultancy, to carry out a study which addressed the need for evaluation. This report examines the social value generated by building society branches across the UK, combining customer survey data, site visits, and stakeholder engagement with Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis.

The aim is to provide a clear, accessible account of:

- how branches create value beyond only financial services
- who benefits from their presence
- the scale of these benefits, including monetised social value and personal stories
- what this means for decisions about the future of in-person services

Report Structure

This report presents the key findings in plain language, supported by evidence and real-world examples.

A more detailed technical report is available upon request, which provides the full methodology and data analysis underpinning these conclusions.

¹ <https://www.ukfinance.org.uk/system/files/2025-10/Payment%20Markets%20Report%20Summary.pdf>

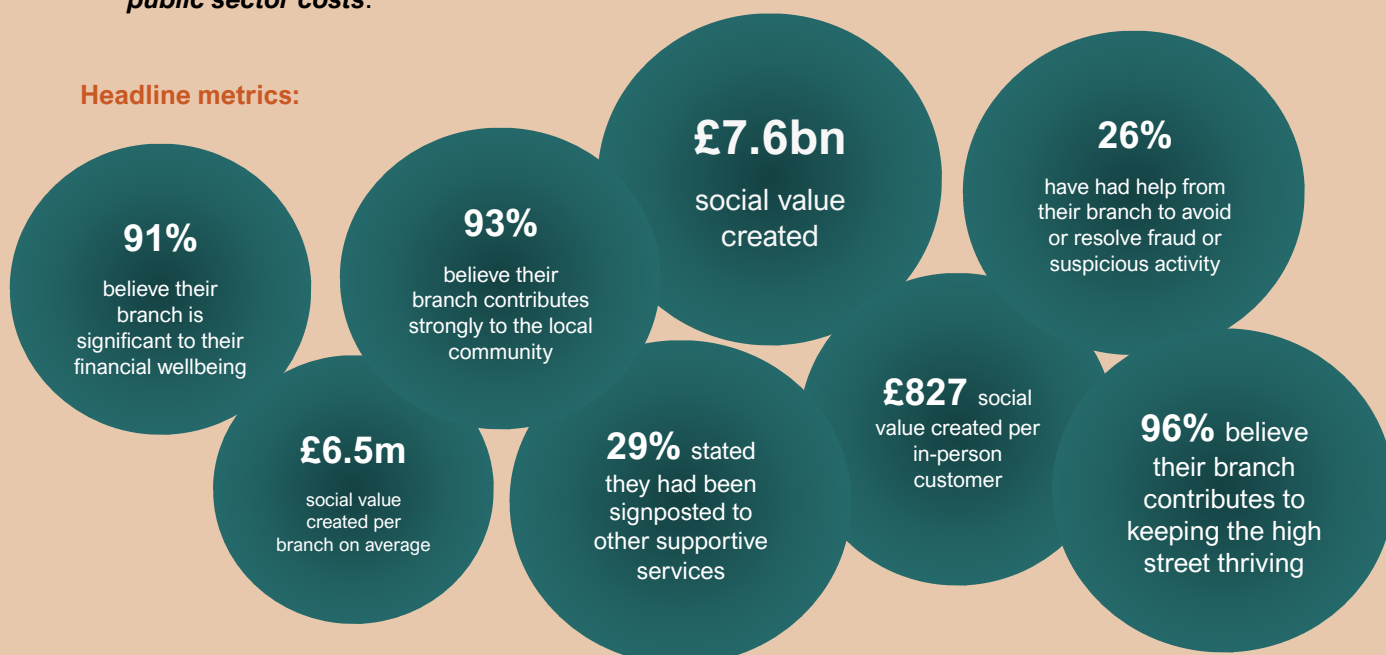
Key Findings at a Glance

Branches deliver substantial social value across the UK, including both individual and societal benefits. They support customers, communities, and the high street, often in ways that cannot be captured in traditional financial reporting.

Key findings:

- Building society branches face sustainability pressures from issues such as **digitisation, demographic change and high street decline**.
- Despite this, they continue to deliver essential social value through **financial support and guidance, fraud prevention, wellbeing and emotional support, learning and guidance, and contributions to local communities and high street vitality**.
- Branches serve a wide customer base. While they are **most frequently used by older customers, young people, digitally less confident customers, and those experiencing physical, mental or financial vulnerability** also benefit greatly.
- Branch roles and activities vary by location and focus. Core outcomes remain consistent, although the **scale and intensity of impact vary** across different contexts.
- Overall, branches **generate significant social value for individuals** and help **mitigate wider public sector costs**.

Headline metrics:



What this Means

- Branches operate as **core social infrastructure**, delivering financial inclusion, safeguarding and wellbeing alongside financial services.
- Branch social value is **consistent and predictable**, meaning it can be understood, compared and managed rather than treated as incidental.
- **Human interaction remains essential** to preventing harm, supporting trust and enabling safe engagement with digital services.
- Branches play a **place-based role**, acting as community anchors that contribute to high street vitality and local resilience.

Social value figures reflect the range of benefits customers experience over time, calculated using conservative assumptions in line with recognised SROI practice.

Why Branches Matter Today

Building societies are a vital part of the UK financial landscape, serving around 27 million members and maintaining a significant high street presence. Unlike shareholder-owned banks, they operate for the benefit of members, reinvesting profits to support homeownership, savings, and local communities. Branches are central to this model, providing not only access to financial products but also social and community value.

Financial and Market Context

As of the most recent sector data, there are 1,367 building society branches in the UK across 42 building societies. There are variations in the scale and operation of these societies: some offer full current account functions, while others focus predominantly on savings and loans.

Building societies hold a substantial share of the UK mortgage and savings markets, and their branches account for 35% of high-street financial service locations in 2025, more than double their share in 2013.² This is partially driven by banks reducing their branch network, with 432 bank closures recorded in 2025 alone, while many building societies commit to retaining theirs.³

However, it should be acknowledged that transactions are increasingly moving online, with around 64% of transactions conducted digitally in 2024, while cash usage accounted for 9 per cent of all payments in Britain.⁴ This trend is likely to continue and may have implications for the sector.

Social Context

Engagement with financial services varies according to age, digital confidence, and socio-economic circumstances. Although digital banking continues to grow, digital access and capability are not evenly distributed. Around 16% of UK adults lack basic digital skills, and 4% have no internet access.⁵

Financial capability varies across the UK population: around 12% of adults had low financial capability in 2024, and many young adults hold relatively low savings balances, which influence how people engage with financial services and the channels they use for complex transactions or guidance.^{6 7}

Challenges and Pressures

Digitisation, demographic changes, and altered usage patterns create tension between financial efficiency and community service.

In some areas, high street contraction and the withdrawal of other local services alter the role of remaining physical access points within communities.

At the same time, the expansion of digital and AI-enabled advice channels is reshaping how support is delivered, contributing to ongoing debate about accessibility, trust, and the role of physical service points within the financial services system.

This context highlights a financial services environment undergoing structural and behavioural change.

Understanding how different groups experience and navigate this environment provides a foundation for assessing the social value associated with branch-based services.

² <https://www.bsa.org.uk/statistics/sector-info-performance/building-society-trading-updates/building-societies-trading-update-june-2025>

³ <https://www.which.co.uk/money/banking/switching-your-bank/bank-branch-closures-is-your-local-bank-closing-ayYyu4i9RdHy>

⁴ <https://www.ukfinance.org.uk/system/files/2025-10/Payment%20Markets%20Report%20Summary.pdf>

⁵ [2024 Consumer Digital Index](https://www.consumer.digital/index)

⁶ <https://www.fca.org.uk/publication/financial-lives/financial-lives-survey-2024-key-findings.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.oecd.org/en/blogs/2025/03/the-role-of-financial-literacy.html>

Who Benefits From Branches

Building society branches serve a broad cross-section of the public, but the findings of this research show that some groups rely on in-person services more heavily and experience particular benefits.

Based on modelled branch network usage, this study assumed approximately 9.2 million members are in-person customers.

Profile of Customers Surveyed

This study surveyed 576 customers across 44 branches and eight building societies, providing insight into who is using branches and their circumstances. Of those surveyed:

- **Older customers form the majority:**
56% of respondents were aged 65 or over, 33% were aged 35–64, and 11% were under 35.
- **Financial security varies:**
80% considered themselves financially secure, 5% did not, and 16% preferred not to disclose their situation.
- **Digital disengagement is significant:**
35% never use digital or telephone banking and 13% use it rarely. A further 16% use it only occasionally.
- **Language profile:**
99% reported English as their first language, while 6% had received support in another language. Other languages included Polish, Punjabi, and Welsh. *
- **Health-related vulnerabilities are present:**
15% reported a long-term physical or mental health condition affecting daily activities, similar to the national average of 17.8%, with a further 9% preferring not to say.

*As the survey was conducted in English, customers whose first language is not English are likely underrepresented. Branch evidence shows bilingual and language support is often part of everyday service.

These characteristics help explain why face-to-face services remain important and why certain outcomes, such as reassurance, fraud protection, and practical guidance, are strongly reported.

Stakeholder Groups and Reported Benefits

The digital survey provided detailed evidence on branch customers, while site visits and qualitative engagement identified additional stakeholder and community impacts. Together, these sources show that branches create value both directly through customer services and more widely through their community role.

General Customers

All customers benefit from access to in-person financial services, such as financial guidance and safe access to ATMs.

75% say transactions are made easier, **68%** feel their money is safer, and **62%** feel their branch saves them time and convenience due to its locality.

Older Customers

Older people are the largest user group and often benefit in additional ways:

40% feel companionship when visiting (vs 29% under 65), **27%** of over 65's say that their branch has helped them avoid or resolve a scam, and **78%** say their branch is very important to their financial wellbeing (vs 68% under 65).

Vulnerable Customers

This includes people with physical or mental health conditions or financial insecurity:

73% feel their personal circumstances or needs were understood, and **38%** reported being signposted to additional support services.

Digitally Excluded Individuals

48% of customers rarely or never use digital or telephone banking. People with low digital confidence or access benefit from:

- Practical help completing tasks
- Step-by-step digital support
- Continued access to services without needing to go online

Non-Customers and Community Groups

Where branches host community facilities:

- Local groups use meeting space
- Residents access events or information
- Charities benefit from fundraising, volunteering, or visibility

The Wider Community and High Street

Customers state that their branch contributes to high street vitality:

70% believe their branch makes a very strong contribution to the local community, and **74%** believe it helps keep the high street thriving.

Younger Customers

While older customers make up the majority of branch users, branches still provide important benefits for the smaller number of younger people who use them.

Among those aged 16–24, **76%** say branches increase their financial confidence (compared with 53% overall) and **52%** report gaining financial education or online banking skills (compared with 30%). Younger respondents were also more likely to say their branch helped them avoid scams (**33%** compared with 26% overall), suggesting that although fewer young people use branches, those who do may gain disproportionate benefits some areas.

Overall, while all customers benefit from core financial services, the evidence shows that older people, digitally excluded individuals, and those experiencing vulnerability derive particularly significant value from in-person branches.

How Branches Create Value

Building society branches create value through multiple, interconnected pathways. While they provide core financial services, their role extends far beyond transactions, supporting members' wellbeing, skills, and community connections.



Financial Access and Support

- Branches provide essential access to savings, mortgages, and guidance for those who cannot or prefer not to use digital banking.
- They support older adults, digitally excluded groups, and members managing complex life events, helping maintain financial confidence and independence.



Wellbeing and Emotional Support

- Branches are trusted spaces for social interaction, reassurance, and emotional support, with staff members knowing many customers by their first name.
- Regular contact with staff can reduce stress, increase confidence, and provide support during life changes such as bereavement, illness, or financial difficulty.



Financial Safety and Security

- Staff provide valuable guidance against scams and financial mismanagement.
- Beyond digital safeguards, customers are protected through routine interactions, with staff members often identifying vulnerability, offering reassurance, and preventing potential financial harm.



Learning and Guidance

- Staff help members navigate financial products and build digital skills, improving literacy and confidence in managing money.
- Support ranges from basic guidance on banking apps to workshops and sessions on issues such as digital literacy or dementia awareness.



Community Engagement

- Branches actively engage with local communities through volunteering, partnerships, and educational initiatives.
- Activities include school financial literacy sessions, local charity support, and community learning events, which strengthen social cohesion and civic engagement.



High Street Vitality

- Newer and recently refurbished branches often include community space provision, such as library space.
- Their presence contributes to vibrant, active high streets, supporting the social and economic fabric of towns and cities.

Financial Support

Helping people manage money with confidence and stability

What Happens

Branches provide in-person access to everyday banking and financial guidance, including cash services, passbooks, savings and mortgage conversations, and support with complex paperwork or life events such as bereavement or changes in circumstances. Staff tailor explanations to individual customer needs, take time to answer questions, and help customers navigate financial decisions without the need to use digital channels.

Who Benefits

- Older customers who rely on face-to-face banking
 - Customers with low digital confidence or access
 - People managing complex financial situations or life transitions
 - Younger customers building financial confidence and savings habits
- 75%** say the branch makes it easier to access and manage their money
 - 68%** feel their money is safer because of using the branch
 - 62%** say the branch reduces the need to travel elsewhere for banking
 - 74%** say visiting the branch is very important to their financial wellbeing

The Difference it Makes

Branches function as a trusted, local financial anchor at a time of widespread bank closures and digitisation. They reduce anxiety, support informed decision-making, and help customers build financial resilience over time, particularly where digital services alone are not suitable.

Total Social Value



£2.4 billion

Driven primarily by improved financial wellbeing through improved financial education, budgeting and money management. This improves stakeholders' financial literacy and reduces financial anxiety.

What People Say

"The staff are really helpful and make managing my money easy, it is nice being able to speak to someone face to face."

"They have been a great help with arranging my 1st mortgage."

"Excellent support for elderly people with little knowledge"

"Without them I would have to travel to use banking facilities. They are invaluable to people, especially retirees."

"They have really helped me control my spending and made sure my bills get paid."

"They helped me pay a bill electronically."

Safety and Security

Protecting customers from fraud, scams and financial harm

What Happens

Branch staff provide an active safeguarding role through everyday vigilance and conversation. This includes checking unusual transactions, discussing potential risks, delivering fraud awareness guidance, and intervening when concerns arise. In more serious cases, branches delay payments and liaise with families, police or support services.

Who Benefits

- Older customers at higher risk of fraud
 - Vulnerable customers experiencing confusion, coercion or exploitation
 - Younger customers at risk of online scams
 - Families and carers who gain reassurance through early intervention
- **26%** say branch staff have helped them avoid or resolve a scam or fraud
 - **68%** say the branch helps them feel their money is safe
 - **33%** report receiving fraud prevention guidance at the branch
 - Among younger customers, **one-third** report scam prevention support

The Difference it Makes

Branches provide a crucial human layer of protection that digital systems alone cannot offer. Early intervention prevents financial loss, reduces stress and anxiety, and protects people from longer-term harm associated with fraud and exploitation.

Total Social Value



£2.2 billion

Branches have saved customers significant financial loss by having a high-street presence, providing trusted advisors to members at risk of fraud and financial scams. Staff are able to intercept suspicious activity, as well as educate customers on safety and security measures.

What People Say

“Someone contacted me saying I was eligible for new insulation in my roof... and gave me a bill for £6000. When I came into the building society, they immediately picked up on the whole thing being fishy, and while I was a bit shaken, they saved me a lot of money!! It's so comforting that there are still people that will look out for you in this day and age.”

“I received an email regarding tax I was owed, and it was asking me for my account details, it looked genuine however when talking to your lovely staff, they helped me to see that it was a scam.”

“I was going to buy a bike from Facebook market place, but it was a scam. They stopped me from sending the money.”

Wellbeing and Emotional Support

Providing reassurance, familiarity and human connection

What Happens

Branches offer consistent, respectful face-to-face interaction in calm and welcoming environments. Staff provide informal check-ins, support during difficult life moments, and personalised service where customers feel known and understood. For some customers, visits offer regular social contact as well as practical help.

Who Benefits

- Older customers, particularly those living alone
 - Customers experiencing bereavement, ill-health or isolation
 - Vulnerable customers who benefit from continuity and familiarity
 - People who value human interaction alongside financial services
- **93%** feel welcome and respected when visiting their branch
 - **68%** feel staff understand their personal circumstances
 - **37%** report experiencing a sense of companionship
 - **88%** say branch visits are important to their general wellbeing

The Difference it Makes

Branches contribute to emotional wellbeing by reducing loneliness, anxiety and stress. While not a substitute for care services, they provide everyday stability, dignity and reassurance, particularly for people at greater risk of isolation.

Total Social Value



£1.4 billion

Branch staff provide a trusted personal touch, supporting customers with financial management in times of ill health, such as Dementia, creating significant social value. Ensuring access is available also reduces anxiety and preserves mental wellbeing.

What People Say

“The branch is a warm, welcoming place backed by knowledgeable staff, who are happy to help and go above and beyond. It feels like the heart of the community now that we have lost all the other banks and building societies in the area.”

“I feel very looked after. I had been diagnosed with Dementia and am waiting to see the admiral nurse... I am being helped by the specialist support team and my money lasts now.”

“Staff are lovely, it’s nice to see faces and speak to actual people rather than a screen. It’s also good for people’s mental health.”

“The staff are like friends.”

“I recently witnessed the caring yet professional way the staff dealt with a challenging customer.”

“When I was worried about finances they gave me a number for citizens advice Gateshead hub.”

Learning and Guidance

Building confidence, skills and independence

What Happens

Branches support learning through one-to-one guidance and informal education. This includes help using digital banking, understanding financial products, recognising scams, and building confidence with money management. Support is paced to the individual and delivered without pressure.

Who benefits

- Customers with low digital confidence
- Older customers adapting to digital systems
- Younger customers building financial literacy
- Vulnerable customers who need clear, trusted explanations

- **71%** report receiving some form of guidance or learning
- **25%** received help using digital banking
- **30%** received financial education or guidance
- **34%** say guidance received was important to their understanding

The Difference it Makes

Trusted, face-to-face guidance helps people remain independent, make informed decisions, and engage more confidently with financial systems, reducing exclusion and reliance on others.

Total Social Value



£1.6 billion

Primarily caused by providing financial guidance leading to better financial decisions, new skills development, and increased confidence around health issues such as dementia, potentially leading to better home care.

What People Say

"I run a chair yoga class in a church hall and the manager came to do a presentation on fraud which was interesting to informative."

"[I was] provided [with] digital support."

Community Outreach

Strengthening local networks and social cohesion

What Happens

Branches support local charities and community organisations through fundraising, volunteering, partnerships and shared space. Staff signpost customers to advice services and support networks, often responding flexibly to local need.

Who Benefits

- Local charities and voluntary organisations
 - Non-customers accessing community activities
 - The wider community through stronger local networks
- **93%** say the branch contributes strongly to the local community
 - Customers identify a wide range of charity and community activities
 - **29%** report being signposted to other services by branch staff

The Difference it Makes

Branches extend their impact beyond banking by helping fill gaps left by shrinking public services, supporting local resilience and strengthening community connections.

Total Social Value



Branches community outreach creates outcomes such as:

- Financial support for local causes and charities
- Additional resource for charities through volunteering
- Strengthening community cohesion through the hosting of community groups, events, and local initiatives within branch spaces

These contributions are not monetised and are presented as additional social value as outcomes. The benefits vary across participants and organisations, are often shared with others, and there is limited consistent evidence on the scale of individual change to support robust financial valuation. They are therefore described qualitatively to ensure these benefits are recognised.

What People Say

“The local branch is a testament to the Society’s commitment to community involvement. Their mere presence here is proof of their purpose. We would be lost without this local resource.”

“The help this branch gives charities is crucial. If this bank closed, it would cause problems. People [would have] to go to the high street in the town centre [and pay] bus fares and taxis.”

“They do a Christmas raffle for the local Hospice every year. They do online training for their staff for dementia awareness and have their own charitable foundation that helps local charities.”

High Street Vitality

Anchoring confidence and activity on the high street

What Happens

Branches maintain a visible, trusted presence on high streets, generating regular footfall and supporting neighbouring businesses. In many towns, they are one of the last remaining financial institutions in the centre.

Who Benefits

- Local residents
- Nearby businesses and retailers
- Town centres facing service withdrawal
- Communities seeking stability and confidence

- **96%** say the branch contributes to a busy, thriving high street

The Difference it Makes

A continued branch presence supports economic confidence, social interaction and a sense of place, particularly in smaller towns and communities experiencing decline.

Total Social Value



Branches also support the vitality of local high streets. Their presence contributes to:

- Sustaining footfall in town and neighbourhood centres
- Maintaining access to in-person financial services locally
- Retaining a trusted community presence as other services withdraw

These place-based contributions are not monetised and are presented as additional social value. They are shaped by multiple factors, and not readily attributable to a single organisation with sufficient precision for robust financial valuation. They are therefore described qualitatively to ensure these benefits are recognised.

What People Say

“Their presence on the high street is very important to the local community as there are now no banks in the town”.

“I feel it’s very important that our high st has a branch and enables access to cash. It also improves the facilities on the high street.”

How Branches Differ by Type

Building society branches operate in different settings and serve different patterns of need. To reflect this, branches in the study were grouped into types based on **location** (urban or rural) and **primary role** (transactional, mixed, or community-focused).

All branch types create social value, but *how that value is delivered* varies depending on local context, customer profile, and service mix.

Branch Type	Typical Setting	Primary Role	Distinctive Features
Urban Transactional	Town and city centres	High-volume service delivery	Fast access, scam checks, support for digitally excluded customers at scale
Urban Mixed	Suburban or district centres	Transactions plus guidance	Blend of routine services and longer support conversations
Urban Community-Focused	Local high streets	Advisory and community role	Space for guidance, events, and community engagement
Rural Transactional	Market towns and service centres	Essential access point	Key location for cash, identity checks, and in-person help where alternatives are limited
Rural Mixed	Small towns	Service and advisory hub	Familiar staff, repeat visits, informal safeguarding
Rural Community-Focused	Villages or small communities	Social and civic anchor	Strong relationship role, meeting space, and local visibility

How Value Delivery Varies

Financial Access and Support

- Transactional branches focus on speed and reliability of core services.
- Rural branches often provide the only local face-to-face option.

Financial Safety and Security

- Urban transactional branches handle large volumes of suspicious or unusual transactions.
- Mixed and community branches may identify risk through longer conversations and relationships.

Wellbeing and Emotional Support

- Community-focused branches create more opportunity for conversation, familiarity, and emotional reassurance.
- Rural branches often play an informal social role, particularly for older customers.

Learning and Guidance

- Mixed branches frequently provide step-by-step help with forms, processes, and digital tools.
- Community-focused branches may host learning sessions or outreach activity.

Community Outreach

- Urban community-focused branches contribute to local events, partnerships, and civic activity.

High Street Vitality

- Rural community branches often act as a visible local anchor, reinforcing the viability of small high streets

The typology shows that branches are not interchangeable units. A high-volume urban branch and a small rural community branch may both generate social value, but through different mechanisms.

Understanding these differences is important when assessing the impact of service changes, as the consequences for customers and communities depend on the role a branch plays locally, not just its transaction numbers.

The Social Value of the Building Society Branch Network

The total social value of Building Society branches is estimated to be **£7.6 billion**.

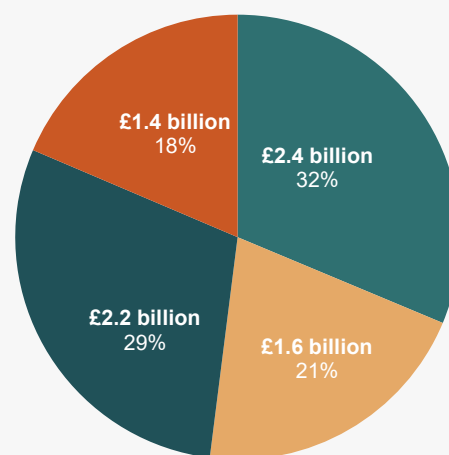
Based on a reported **9.2 million in-person customers**, estimated using a 12-month reporting period at the time of the assessment. This equates to an average of **approximately £827 per customer**. It should be noted that this is a population average, not an amount received by each individual and indicates the **scale of value generated relative to customer reach**.

The total comprises a mix of **one-off outcomes** (e.g. fraud prevention, skills development) and **recurring outcomes** (e.g. positive wellbeing), with impacts expressed as the value in a typical year.

Value by Theme

Sub-Feature	Social Value (£)	% of Total
Financial Support	£2.4 billion	31.3%
Financial Safety	£2.2 billion	29.4%
Learning and Guidance	£1.6 billion	20.7%
Wellbeing and Emotional Support	£1.4 billion	18.6%

*Community outreach and high street vitality themes were not monetised



■ Financial Support
■ Learning and Guidance
■ Financial Safety
■ Wellbeing and Emotional Support

Financial support and safety account for the largest share of value, followed by learning and guidance and wellbeing and emotional support, which, while lower, remain a significant creator of social impact.

Key outcomes:

Major contributors to social value include:

- **Avoidance of fraud:** Customers reported building societies helping them to avoid cases of fraud generating **£1.65 billion** in social value.
Valued using a proxy for the average societal cost of a single fraud case.
- **Wellbeing from feeling respected:** **£920 million** in social value generated through Customers feeling a sense of belonging and respect through staff interactions.
Based on subjective wellbeing valuation, moderated to reflect the lighter-touch nature of routine branch interactions.
- **Increased convenience:** Customers reported time and effort saved from having building societies local to them which generated **£868 million** in social value.
Valued using a work-life balance wellbeing proxy, proportionally adjusted to reflect the branch as one contributing factor.
- **Wealth creation through improved budgeting and money management:** The social value generated from Customers increasing savings from new knowledge totalled **£310 million**.
Valued using a proxy for money saved from budgeting.
- **Digital skills development:** **£297 million** in social value generated through Customers learning basic digital skills through support from branches.
Based on the annual wage uplift associated with gaining basic digital skills.

Value by Branch Type

Feature	% of Total Customers	Social Value (£)	% of Total Social Value
Urban Mixed	39.5%	£3.9 billion	51.6%
Rural Mixed	53.8%	£3.1 billion	42.4%
Rural Transactional	3.7%	£366 million	3.6%
Urban Transactional	1.3%	£189 million	0.7%
Urban Community	1.1%	£123 million	1.0%
Rural Community	0.6%	£94 million	0.7%

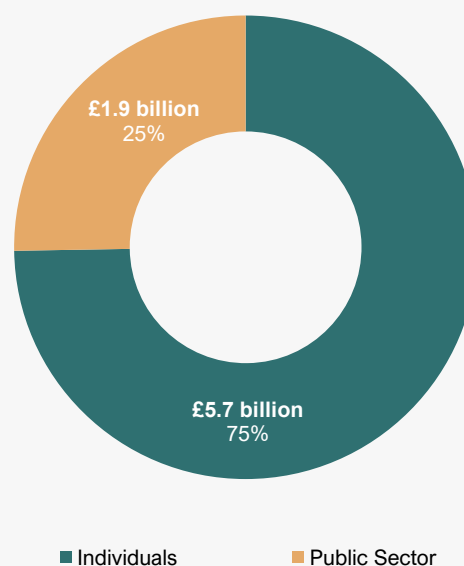
The above table demonstrates:

- **Mixed branches drive the majority of social value**, accounting for 94% of the total. Urban Mixed branches are the highest performers relative to their customer base, while Rural Mixed branches provide the broadest reach, serving over half of all customers.
- **Community branches deliver proportional impact per customer**, matching their 1.7% customer share with 1.7% of total social value, a stronger ratio than either transactional branch type, and one that suggests meaningful depth of impact despite operating at a small scale
- **Transactional branches contribute less value relative to their customer footprint**, but remain essential infrastructure for financial access and geographic coverage

Value by Distribution

Distribution	Social Value (£)	% of Total
Individuals	£5.7 billion	75%
Public Sector	£1.9 billion	25%

Most value accrues directly to **individuals**, through financial security, wellbeing, and access to support. The **public sector** benefits through reduced demand on services such as welfare, health, and fraud response.



Summary of Social Value

Building society branches delivers substantial social value across financial, wellbeing, safety, and learning outcomes. Learning and Guidance and Financial Support are the largest drivers of value. Mixed branches contribute most of the value due to customer volume and service breadth. Benefits primarily accrue to individuals, with significant indirect value to the public sector.

Methodology

This study took a mixed-methods approach to capture the social impact created by building society branches across the UK.

The approach balances rigour with readability, ensuring the findings are credible, understandable, and actionable.

Study Design

Branch Selection: A representative sample of 43 branches was selected across the network, covering different sizes, locations, and roles. Branches were grouped into four types:

- Urban Transactional
- Urban Mixed
- Urban Community
- Rural Transactional
- Rural Mixed
- Rural Community

Stakeholder Engagement:

- Member society interviews (7) and workshop attendees (12) to understand intended benefits of the branch network
- Staff interviews (22 staff across 7 branches to understand branch practices and mechanisms of impact.
- Member and customer interviews (39 responses) capturing usage patterns, perceived benefits, and outcomes.
- Member and customer surveys capturing quantitative evidence of benefits (576)

Site Visits: 7 branches visited to observe operations, interactions, and community engagement.

Outcomes and Measurement

The study assessed a combination of **individual and societal outcomes** based on stakeholder feedback, including:

- Financial access and inclusion
- Financial safety and fraud prevention
- Wellbeing and emotional support
- Knowledge, skills, and digital confidence
- Community engagement and high street vitality

Summary of Methodology

The study provides a robust, evidence-based assessment of how branches generate value. By combining survey data, site visits, interviews, and SROI analysis, it quantifies benefits while capturing the human and community dimensions of branch activity.

Social Return on Investment (SROI)

SROI analysis was applied to monetise outcomes where possible, allowing a detailed understanding of the impact of the outcomes.

The outcomes identified through the data collection process were monetised by assigning financial proxy values, measurable indicators that represent the value created, to each outcome, after the aggregation process. RealWorth applied its library of proxy values, adjusted for inflation, to undertake this step.

Customer survey responses were used to identify whether individuals had ever experienced specific outcomes as a result of using branch services, such as improved financial knowledge, prevention of fraud, or improvements in wellbeing. These responses were used to estimate the proportion of the current customer base experiencing each outcome.

The SROI analysis then valued the benefits generated by these outcomes based on one year of branch activity, providing an estimate of the annual social value associated with branch services. Where outcomes are expected to persist beyond a single year, standard SROI assumptions on impact duration (up to three years) and drop-off were applied to reflect how benefits diminish over time

Further adjustments were made for:

- **Deadweight:** What would have happened without the branch
- **Attribution:** What proportion of the outcome is due to the branch versus other factors
- **Drop-off:** How long the impact lasts over time

A detailed explanation of this process can be found in the full report.

Conclusions

The evidence shows that building society branches deliver layered social value that cannot be replaced by digital provision alone. Their role extends beyond transactions, combining financial access, safeguarding, wellbeing support and place-based value, particularly for people and communities most exposed to exclusion.

This evidence is particularly relevant in the context of widespread bank branch closures, accelerating digitisation and rising financial vulnerability. As face-to-face services decline elsewhere, the relative importance of building society branches increases rather than diminishes.

The findings of the study have several strategic implications:

- 1. Branches should be maintained and invested in to deliver inclusion and wellbeing.** Branches should be maintained and recognised as core social infrastructure, delivering financial inclusion, safeguarding, and wellbeing.
- 2. Strategic insights should be used to guide branch improvement.** The consistent, predictable social value of branches should inform targeted actions, resource allocation, and performance monitoring to enhance financial inclusion, safeguard vulnerable customers, support digital adoption, and strengthen community impact.
- 3. Branches may have untapped potential for younger customers.** Although younger customers visit branches less frequently, the outcomes associated with their visits are notable. This highlights a potential opportunity for building societies to strengthen engagement with younger members through the branch network.
- 4. Vulnerable and digitally excluded groups should be prioritised for branch access.** Branch locations and services should ensure access is available for vulnerable and digitally excluded groups, protect independence, safety, and dignity while reducing downstream social and public service costs.
- 5. Human interaction remains strategically important.** Branches should be integrated alongside digital services to prevent harm, support digital inclusion, and maintain the resilience of the financial system.
- 6. Branches should be recognised and shaped as community anchors.** Strategic investment and policy support should reinforce branches' role as community anchors, sustaining high street vitality, civic engagement, and local social and economic wellbeing.

The findings suggest that decisions about branch networks should consider social and community impacts alongside financial performance. Where branches are retained, their role as trusted, local points of support can be actively recognised and strengthened.

Building society branches are not simply an alternative way to access banking, but a form of local social infrastructure rooted in the communities they serve.

Final Considerations

The findings of this study have clear implications:

- **For building societies**, they provide robust evidence that branch networks are a core part of the value proposition, complementing digital services and delivering outcomes aligned with social purpose.
- **For regulators and policymakers**, they demonstrate that changes to branch networks have consequences that extend far beyond consumer choice, with potential implications for inclusion, safeguarding, and public cost.
- **For local communities**, they confirm that branches remain anchors of trust, stability, and civic presence on the high street.

Decisions about the future of branches should be informed not only by transaction volumes or preferences of some consumer groups, but by a full understanding of social value and long-term impact.

Why This Study is Credible

The findings in this report are underpinned by a robust and transparent evaluation framework designed to produce credible and decision-useful evidence. The study draws on both qualitative and quantitative data, including customer survey evidence, engagement with branch staff, and Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis, ensuring that conclusions are grounded in lived experience as well as measurable outcomes.

The approach is consistent with recognised social value principles, with a clear focus on outcomes rather than activities, stakeholder experience, and proportionality in data use. Outcomes were identified and tested to reflect meaningful changes in people's lives and assessed using established wellbeing valuation methods.

The SROI analysis supports the qualitative findings by providing a defensible estimate of social value relative to operating costs. Conservative assumptions were applied transparently, and the results should therefore be interpreted as a robust lower-bound estimate of the impact generated by the building society branch network.



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