

Kent Savers Annual General Meeting

Chair's statement – May 2023

This has been a challenging year for Kent Savers as it has focused on delivering value to our members and contributing to the financial resilience of our community.

Our lending business is weighted towards people who have experienced severe financial impact through both the pandemic and the deepening cost-of-living crisis. We continue to contact members in need and put appropriate arrangements in place to support them.

I am grateful to the Kent Savers team and volunteers for the incredible work they have done over the last twelve months. We have seen quite a few changes in the team, and I believe we are well positioned to build on our business development successes.

Adam Male has stepped down as business development director and is now an active member of the Board. Mary Anum left as Finance Director, and John Stokes agreed to take on the responsibilities of Treasurer. We have well qualified Board and Supervisory Committee members who are approaching the next stage of Kent Saver's growth with enthusiasm and energy.

In the core team, Rebecca and Karen continue to provide outstanding service to members and are hugely valued for the work they do.

I will be stepping down as Chair after this AGM; we have identified and offered the role to an outstanding candidate and are in the process of formally appointing him to succeed me. These changes are part of the normal life of a volunteer-led organisation and are consistent with good governance practices of changing people with key responsibilities on a regular basis.

Nothing changes about who we are; Kent Savers remains committed to fair loans, safe savings, and the long-term benefits of membership. This Purpose is articulated in the Credit Union's mission statement:

Kent Savers is a community financial organisation owned and controlled by members for their benefit that operates with care, efficiency, and integrity.

We aim to build lifelong relationships with our members by meeting their financial needs and supporting their financial well-being. We encourage saving and wise use of credit.

We aspire to grow our membership to support the needs of more people and build community financial resilience, while maintaining our long-term financial stability.

Four key values underpin how we behave with members and other stakeholders:

- **Caring:** *we look after our members*
- **Responsive:** *we listen to our members and respond promptly to them*
- **Ethical:** *we support our communities by helping the most disadvantaged*
- **Trustworthy:** *we offer high levels of integrity and professionalism which inspires trust*

The role that Kent Savers plays in building financial strength and resilience in our community and addressing the risk of growing and persistent problem debt is recognised by our partners and members, and we are grateful for the financial support and capital contributions we received from them in the past year.

These values have driven our business development initiatives in the last year:

We have continued to develop social media marketing, including using video case studies from our members; we intend social marketing to continue but with an eye on costs.

We wish to thank Kent County Council, the Citizen's Advice Bureau offices and Crosslight Advice for their assistance in helping to set up a new Debt Relief Order referral scheme with Kent Savers.

We are also very grateful for Kent County Council's active involvement in designing a new Underwritten Loan Scheme, which is a pilot to offer a zero-interest loan to people who would, as a result, be able to self-address financial arrears.

We are also working with Kent County Council as part of the broad-ranging Financial Hardship group which is a cross-Kent collaboration supported by [ReferKent](#), an online platform enabling referrals to be made securely between advice agencies and their partners.

For some years now Kent Savers has collaborated with Bexley Council to help tenants referred by Bexley with rent deposits. Following a change in the way this is supported by central government, the scheme is now being run off.

Kent Savers has been working very hard in the last year to create new, sustainable income streams and to strengthen county-wide partnerships.

We held an Outreach Event in March 2023 attended by Damian Green, MP, executives of Fair4All Finance with which we are hoping to form closer joint initiatives, KCC, some of Kent's high-profile Ambassadors, representation from the Diocese of Rochester, grant providers, district councils and Housing Associations.

We discussed three questions in that meeting: (i) how does Kent Savers utilise their own outreach to support more potential members, in particular those experiencing financial challenges right now; (ii) how does Kent Savers strengthen its capital base and ratios such that we can support many more members; and (iii) how can we work closer with firms across Kent (and in particular the local authorities and housing associations) to reduce the

dependency on loan interest to cover operational costs – for example by increasing access to skilled volunteers within their own organisations.

Work from that event is very much ongoing; in just the last month we have progressed discussions with KCC, two local authorities and housing associations, the umbrella organisation for housing providers and associated firms in Kent, a large NHS trust regarding their own staff's welfare, and one of the Church of England Deaneries. The focus of those programs is on making Kent Savers part of affordability solutions with Housing Associations' and Local Authorities' residents or constituents; outreach to members through church communities to the foodbank network; and advocacy of Kent Savers in a particular social sector to their own stakeholders.

Strengthening Kent Savers' capital base is an ongoing priority and we are pleased to report some success with donations, gifts and grants. We are very grateful for the generosity of members who have gifted their deposits with Kent Savers as capital or subordinated loans.

In Spring 2022 Kent Savers launched its first Annual Members Survey (which is about to be repeated). In summary of the results:

Kent Savers' values and reputation:

- 80% of our members recommend us, and 62% are pleased with the services they receive.
- 65% of our members recognise that we are a fairer lender than other lenders, that we support our communities (57%), and that we offer a high level of trust (65%).

Positive impact on the well-being of our members and communities:

- Our members care most about their household health (81%) and the needs and well-being of their local communities (64%).

Diversity and inclusion:

- The majority of 5K+ active members are women (66%).
- Most of our net borrowers live in medium to highly deprived areas (1st and 5th decile of the National Index of Multiple deprivations).
- In contrast, net savers live in the least deprived areas, which may indicate we are offering the right products to the needs of our members.

Our strategy remains to grow the support Kent Savers offers to members and to achieve a sustainable business surplus over the cycle underpinned by increased funding and capital.

The Board looks forward to continuing to serve members over the coming year.

Stephen Sidebottom

Chair