Our social impact programme

Our community investment strategy supports our purpose by addressing key barriers to financial inclusion and helping people overcome them.
Our theory of change

Our community investment strategy supports our purpose by addressing key barriers to inclusion and helping people overcome them.

**Our core themes**

**Customers**

- Invest in activities and initiatives that address key factors which affect someone’s likelihood to be accepted for credit.
- Support both children and adults in their education, helping them secure a brighter financial future.
- Support community projects in areas where people are more likely to face social and financial exclusion.

**Education**

- Providing literacy and numeracy education as well as insights into the world of work.

**Community partners**

- Providing grants to grassroots organisations and charities through community foundations which will support local people in improving aspects of their life.
- To help raise aspirations of both children and adults who live in disadvantaged communities so that they can have a better chance of having a future that sees them included in society.
- To help people overcome personal difficulties that might be preventing them from feeling socially or financially included in the communities in which they live and work.

**What we do**

- We do this through
- Why we do this

**Funding money and debt advice programmes as well as working with mental health charities to ensure we can support our customers when they are feeling vulnerable.**

To ensure that our customers, as well as others who might face financial difficulty, can recognise the barriers to financial inclusion, overcome them, and secure a positive financial future for themselves.

**To help both children and adults secure a brighter financial future.**

**Providing grants to community foundations which will support local people in improving aspects of their life.**

**To help people overcome personal difficulties that might be preventing them from feeling socially or financially included in the communities in which they live and work.**
Our social impact in 2018

Here, you will find some of the highlights from our social impact programme in 2018. After developing our theory of change, which you will have seen on the page previous to this, we decided to make some changes in how we collected social impact data, and what we reported. In previous years, we reported our impact in line with the London Benchmarking Group guidelines; however, this year, we have tailored our data analysis and reporting to fit with our unique programme. Over the next year, we will continue to develop metrics on how best to determine the Group’s social impact.

£1.7m invested to support community programmes, money advice programmes and social research (2017: £2.6m)

27 primary school teachers trained in reciprocal reading techniques

£30,389 donated to employee fundraising efforts

32 young people provided with support to help improve their school attendance

2,415 hours volunteered by employees during work hours (2017: 220 hours)
Supporting our communities

The primary way in which Provident Financial fulfils its purpose is through the provision of credit to customers who are not well served by other lenders or are excluded altogether by them. We do this by responsibly providing our customers with appropriate amounts of credit, maintaining close contact with them throughout the term of their loan and supporting them sympathetically if they experience difficulties. It is through this knowledge and understanding of our customers, and the market we have proudly served since 1880, that we have been able to develop our approach to community investment and ensure that it is aligned to the Group’s purpose of helping to put people on a path to a better everyday life.

Our community investment activities are delivered through our Group-wide Social Impact Programme. The strategy of this programme is to invest in activities and initiatives which seek to address the wide range of social inclusion and social mobility issues that are relevant to our customers and the communities where we operate.

These factors include: lack of literacy or numeracy skills; disabilities and/or mental health issues; unemployment or under-employment; low levels of educational attainment; and low, uncertain or fluctuating incomes.

The Provident Financial Social Impact Programme delivers community investment activities under the following three workstreams:

- **Customer and vulnerability** – working with charities and specialist partners to address issues such as money/debt advice, customer vulnerability, product accessibility and financial difficulties.
- **Education** – supporting both children and adults on aspects of education, particularly those that relate to literacy and numeracy.
- **Community** – supporting Community Foundations and other partners to address the wide range of social inclusion and social mobility issues that are relevant to our customers and the communities where we operate.

2018 community investment figures

- **Total**
  - £1,680,578
  - 2017: £2,591,996

- **Cash**: £1,431,990
  - (2017: £2,354,863)

- **Management costs**: £210,759
  - (2017: £227,581)

- **Value of employee time**: £37,829
  - (2017: £9,552)
We are taking a holistic approach to mental health, recognising our duty of care to both our colleagues and customers. Our mental health programme gives careful consideration to the needs of each business area and role types, paying special attention to our colleagues who are supporting our vulnerable customers. All awareness sessions, training and support networks are in place to encourage an opened culture towards ‘speaking up’ about mental health. By removing the stigma and barriers, typically surrounding negative labels, we are hoping to increase empathy and understanding of poor mental health throughout our businesses.

Annette Saunders
Corporate Responsibility Manager
Vanquis Bank

Customer and vulnerabilities
We support the vulnerable customer agenda through this dedicated workstream of the Group’s Social Impact Programme. The focus of this workstream is to support charities and specialist partners to address issues such as money/debt advice, customer vulnerability and financial difficulties.

To read more about how we identify customers who might be considered as vulnerable, see page 23, and to find out more about how we are working to support the mental health and wellbeing of our colleagues, to ensure they are fighting fit and can support our customers in the best way possible, see page 28.
Through our education programme, we are not only helping to raise literacy and numeracy levels amongst young people in disadvantaged areas but, by introducing them to the world of work, we are building their aspirations and helping them to develop the soft skills and confidence they need in order to be able to make good decisions about their future.

Cathy Prior
Education Lead
Provident Financial plc

Education
Our work on the education theme began in 2017 when we created a communal book space at our Bradford head office, allowing staff to read and share books. Deciding that education should become one of the three pillars of our Social Impact Programme was a straightforward decision, as we know that enabling the children and adults in the communities we serve to improve their levels of educational attainment and develop new skills plays an important role in enabling them to have a better quality of life.

Throughout 2018, we worked with the national charities National Numeracy and National Literacy Trust and a smaller organisation, Leading Children, to help raise numeracy and literacy levels. We are also a founding member and trustee of the Social Mobility Business Partnership.

National Numeracy Day 2018
From getting the best supermarket deals to managing family finances, or understanding salaries to gaining a promotion at work – we all use numbers in our everyday lives. Despite this, one in two working-age people have numeracy levels associated with primary schoolchildren. So, when we were approached by National Numeracy to get involved in the first ever National Numeracy Day in May 2018, we were delighted to sign up as one of the lead supporters because, as a financial services business, ensuring that our customers and staff, and the children and adults in the communities we serve, understand the basics of numeracy is fundamental to being a responsible financial services company.

Our purpose is to put people on a path to a better everyday life and key to this is ensuring our customers understand the terms and conditions of the products they are purchasing from us. In order to do this, they require basic numeracy skills. It is also vital that our staff have the right level of numerical knowledge and skill to support our customers throughout their journey with us.

The day was a success and we achieved an excellent response from staff with 695 registering to use the National Numeracy’s online assessment tool as well as other free learning resources.

We, again, signed up to be a lead supporter of National Numeracy Day again in 2019 and invited employees to sign up to take the numeracy challenge and start on their journey to increase their confidence with numbers.

Tackling barriers to education with School-Home Support
School-Home Support (SHS) is a charity that provides personalised support to children and families to tackle the underlying barriers to successful education and improve the life chances of children. Partnering with schools, local authorities and communities, SHS looks beyond the classroom to understand and tackle the issues affecting children’s learning, such as poverty, inadequate housing and mental health. The organisation uses early intervention to address the root causes of low attendance and poor behaviour, to ensure that children are in school, ready to learn.

The biggest influence on a child’s life is their experiences at home. SHS employs expert practitioners to work with families on addressing a wide range of complex issues, building their engagement and resilience so that they can resolve future issues independently. Without this support, children are much less likely to achieve their best potential.

Working closely with our partner school in Bradford, One In A Million, we provided funding for an SHS practitioner to support a number of young people and their families. In 2018, the practitioner supported 32 individuals on issues such as school attendance, poor housing and mental health. As a result of these interventions, more than half of the young people engaged in the programme saw their school attendance improve. In addition, the practitioner was able to use funding from the SHS Welfare Fund to provide essential items to eight of the families worked with. This included purchasing school uniforms, emergency food and bedding.
CASE STUDY: Leading children into literacy

Leading Children is a Bradford-based learning consultancy which has developed a bespoke literacy programme for us to offer to 12 schools local to our head office in Bradford. We decided to develop this programme after becoming aware that only 70% of schoolchildren in Bradford achieve the expected standards in reading and even less so for writing. There are a wide variety of reasons why this can occur – it could be due to a learning disability or poor teaching, but it could also be because parents cannot afford to buy their children books, or perhaps they cannot help their child with their homework because they do not have good literacy standards themselves. Having difficulty when it comes to reading and writing can lead to low self-esteem and self-worth, closed mindsets, disengagement and lower academic achievements and career prospects.

Through our work with Leading Children, we provide teachers with tools which combine the concepts of reciprocal reading and growth mindset, which helps to change their classroom culture into one that not only allows the children to learn the strategies they need to become good readers and increase their confidence and knowledge, but also enables them to develop a love for reading for pleasure.

Through the Leading Children literacy programme we:
- worked with seven primary schools and five secondary schools in Bradford;
- positively impacted almost 1,000 primary school students in reading, writing, mindset and wellbeing; and
- provided training to 27 primary school teachers.

As a result of the programme, all seven primary schools have taken onboard the programme as their principal method of teaching comprehension and supporting reading in children from Year 2 and above. Out of the five secondary schools who took part, three achieved an average of 61% on their reading scores as a result of the programme whilst the other two achieved an increase of 50% on their reading ages.

We have recently launched the programme at partner schools in Birmingham and Chatham, in addition to Bradford. We have also trained over 40 members of our staff to become reading volunteers. These volunteers will visit the schools each week, spending time with children and helping them to improve their literacy skills as well as enjoyment of reading.

“After last night’s training session the emails were abuzz with positive feedback and ideas from the teachers. Today, I have been at both Brompton-Westbrook and Byron Primary and both schools are full of excited teachers who have made tweaks to their plans for today in order to deliver lessons with a reciprocal reading approach. I think that proves an amazing and instant impact of the training we had; the teaching staff are like excited little children!”

Jon Carthy
Head Teacher
Byron Primary School, Chatham

“Every five years or so, you listen to some training that you know is going to transform the way you teach and today was one of those days for me. Thank you – that was brilliant.”

Teacher
Brompton-Westbrook Academy, Chatham
CASE STUDY: Our partnership with the National Literacy Trust

Developing a partnership with NLT was a natural progression for us. In 2018 we funded the charity’s ‘Words for Work’ programme in two secondary schools in Bradford. In addition, we also funded two ‘Early Words Together’ programmes which support parents and carers by giving them the tools they need to support their children’s early communication and literacy development so that they are school-ready by the age of five. Through our partnership with NLT we will continue to fund the ‘Early Words Together’ programme and, in addition, the ‘Words for Work’ programme has been expanded to include not just secondary schools but post-16 students and primary school children too. Through this new programme we are working with children across five areas of the country – Birmingham, Bradford, Chatham, London and Portsmouth.


**Education continued**

*Words for Work: secondary and post-16*

Entering the world of work can be a daunting experience for many young people, even more so for those in disadvantaged areas. Young people in these areas are more likely to be unemployed when they leave school due to the multiple and complex barriers they face. These can include poor educational experiences and low attainment at school. And many may be from families who are experiencing two or maybe three generations of unemployment and so have no experience of the world of work. Adding that to the fact that many young people will be employed in jobs that do not yet exist means preparing them for the future world of work has never been more challenging.

As a local employer we are one of the best sources of advice and guidance for these students. Our employee volunteers, along with volunteers from other local businesses, come together to share their knowledge and experiences of ‘real-life’ work with the students and give them the opportunity to ask questions about the skills they will need to enter the workplace and open their eyes to different career pathways. They also gain valuable tips on completing job applications and interview practice.

*Words for Work: Dream Big!*

It is never too early to start talking to children about their future. From a very young age children are already starting to form assumptions about what careers will be available to them and a recent report found that gender stereotypes exist from the age of just seven.

The Words for Work: Dream Big programme helps to broaden aspirations and bring the world of work to life for these children.

This year, we hosted a class of children aged 5–6 from Childeric Primary School in New Cross at Vanquis Bank’s offices on Fenchurch Street, London. Employee volunteers spent the morning chatting to the children about their roles whilst taking them on a tour around the different departments and engaging in some fun-filled office-themed activities with them before a visit up to the Sky Gardens to have a look at what kind of jobs might exist up there. We look forward to hosting more school groups from across the country throughout 2019.

In 2018, the Group, along with the other SMBP partners, hosted 53 students through the Work Insight and Skills week. The students spent time taking part in workshops delivered by our corporate functions, including legal and corporate responsibility. In addition to this, students also had access to support through the programme’s bespoke coaching platform. This platform allows them to draw on advice on writing impactful CVs and personal statements, completing university and job application forms and preparing for job interviews.

Community partners
We continue to develop partnerships with Community Foundations, through the community partners strand of our Social Impact Programme. It has proved an effective way of disbursing our funding, allowing us to leverage the expertise that they offer, including their due diligence support. It also means that we can harness their local knowledge, as Community Foundations are rooted in the communities they serve. They have unrivalled insight into the specific issues that those communities are dealing with, as well as the small charities that are helping to tackle them effectively. This means that we can channel the funding we have made available through them, to the areas where it will have the greatest impact.

We currently have partnerships with:

- Leeds Community Foundation;
- London Community Foundation;
- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Community Foundation;
- Kent Community Foundation; and
- Community Foundation in Wales.

In 2018, grants totalling £70,511 were awarded to 17 community organisations.

Sharon Orr
Local Community Lead
Provident Financial plc
The Manjit Wolstenholme Fund

We have recently set up a fund in partnership with Leeds Community Foundation in memory of the Group’s former Chair, Manjit Wolstenholme, who passed away in November 2017. Working closely with Manjit’s husband, the fund will support children and young people in deprived areas of the Bradford district to achieve their potential through educational and aspirational opportunities, reflecting Manjit’s own journey and her commitment to equality and social mobility. The funding will be disbursed as small grants to community organisations who are delivering services aligned to the Fund’s theme. A grants panel, which includes members of Manjit’s family and colleagues from across the Group, will decide which organisations receive funding.

“Manjit was a remarkable woman, whose story of success was inspirational. She was passionate about creating opportunities for others to follow in her footsteps, and that is why the fund’s vision is to enable young people from challenging backgrounds to aim high and achieve their potential.”

Neil Wolstenholme
Manjit’s husband
Hostelling International Northern Ireland (HINI)

Provident has been funding HINI’s GATHER programme for a number of years through our original community investment strategy of directly supporting small charities and organisations in the communities which we serve.

HINI allocates funding to community organisations and groups from the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland, allowing them to provide residential stays at HINI’s youth hostels. Through these stays, HINI is able to provide individuals with respite breaks and give them opportunities to improve their self-awareness and confidence. In addition, they are able to help them build better communities, practice peaceful communication and self-care. A further aim is to support community groups who are working on a cross-community basis. In 2018, 26 community groups received funding with a total of 639 beneficiaries, allowing HINI to reach out to more organisations which existing funding did not allow for.

There have been a number of impacts for beneficiaries, but the opportunity for them to spend time away from their home environment has been consistently cited as one of the most important features of the programme, with participants better able to respect each other’s differences.

This was evidenced through a specific cross-border project that HINI developed through the programme, which brought together 50 young people living in deprived areas of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The group met for two residentials where they experienced community building as a group, team-building activities, and reflection and discussion, as well as story-telling and other group activities. This had a lasting impact on the young people who now see their peers from ‘the other side of the border’ as young people who are just like them. It has given them a better understanding of the different cultural aspects that exist and how they can practice peaceful ways of living together in everyday life.

HINI strongly believes that the physical place where people come together as a community can have many beneficial effects for participants. By convening in a different environment, everyone has to adapt to a new situation, support each other, renegotiate old power dynamics, be flexible and make a conscious effort to feel grounded.

Many participants have never left their home community and their stay at a GATHER residential is often their first time away, making the experience even more powerful for them.

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We cannot stress enough how much positive impact the GATHER programme has on its beneficiaries. They are able to fully immerse themselves into new experiences they do not have in their home communities. This ultimately leads to positive outcomes for hundreds of beneficiaries every year.

Annette Feldman
HINI
CASE STUDY: #GiveBradford update

Supported by funding from Provident Financial, Leeds Community Foundation launched the #GiveBradford campaign in 2017. The aim of the campaign was to develop a giving platform for corporates and individuals across the district, and to leverage existing funding streams and investments already made. Initial development of the platform was informed by consultation with key stakeholders in the city and this process of collaboration continues through the campaign’s steering group, which comprises representation from businesses such as Provident Financial and other key organisations from across the city, including Bradford Council.

Funding from the Group has also been used to underwrite the continued growth of The Bradford 100 Club, which was launched in 2017. This has continued to attract new members from Bradford’s business community who recognise the opportunity to support Bradford’s local communities. A number of events have brought members together to network and hear first-hand feedback from organisations funded through the community foundation. As a result of the development of the #GiveBradford campaign, Leeds Community Foundation has been able to:

- distribute £1.2m in grants across the Bradford district;
- identify £2.3m in trust transfers; and
- set up a new £375,000 ‘Holiday Hunger’ fund with investment from the BG Campbell Trust, Morrisons and the Big Lottery.

Our aim is to give colleagues the tools and resources to contribute to the causes and organisations that mean the most to them, in the way that they feel is most appropriate.

In Bradford, for example, we work with Participate Projects to provide community team challenges for staff to get involved in. These offer a number of important benefits in terms of behavioural and personal skills development. Significantly, during a period where there has been considerable restructuring across the business, the team challenges have been an effective vehicle for bringing new teams and colleagues together in an external environment, to work collaboratively, learn about each other and deliver something valuable for the local community. As a result, in 2018, we saw a significant increase in the number of employees taking part in the team community challenges, with 2,415 hours volunteered during working time. And by using the expertise and local knowledge of Participate Projects, we can ensure that our community team challenges are tackling the issues where volunteers really can make a difference, based on the specific needs of the community organisation itself. It means that colleagues can truly feel they have added value within the community by working with the rest of their team to deliver something that is absolutely needed.

Employer-led volunteering programmes are also available. For example, staff can volunteer to take part in grant panels to help decide how to allocate funding via our community foundation partnerships. In 2018, we saw employees taking part in panels with the Kent Community Foundation, Leeds Community Foundation and Hampshire & Isle of Wight Community Foundation. Our reciprocal reading scheme is growing with the ongoing development of our literacy programme. Employees are given specialist training and can use their paid volunteering allowance to support children’s reading development as part of a structured programme.

Additionally, we encourage our colleagues to volunteer their time and skills for the community organisations of their choosing through our volunteering policy, which offers two days’ volunteering leave per year. They can also claim a volunteering grant for that organisation.

Our matched funding programme continues its popularity and in 2018 we matched employees’ fundraising efforts by £30,389.