

Delivering our proposition



“ We recognise that our customers rely on the Motability Scheme and that we need to protect this over the long term. ”

Mike Betts
Chief Executive

9.8/10

Customer service rating

20,000

One Big Day attendees

Overview

Our business is focused on delivering worry-free motoring to those who face considerable barriers in achieving mobility. Through affordable and straightforward leasing options, we aim to empower people to lead more independent lives; in short, to provide the pathway to everyday freedom that many others take for granted.

For all of us, this is not just a short-term objective. We recognise that our customers rely on the Motability Scheme, so we aim equally to make sure we sustain a secure financial base, to protect the Scheme over the long term. In addition, with no shareholder dividends to pay out, we are able to generate sums for further investment to improve services for customers, and to provide wider support for people with disabilities.

Our operation is delivered through a business model which enables us to provide great value for customers, while ensuring the long-term stability of the Scheme.

Our employees are passionate about delivering our objectives, and we nurture a culture of personal ownership and responsibility, supporting our people in delivering the right results for customers.

Customer service is our priority, and we are delighted that this year, customers have again rated our services at 9.8 out of 10, as well as putting us at the top of the Institute for Customer Services league table in our financial services sector, ahead of many familiar household names.

We continue to invest substantial sums in improvements to customer service, support and infrastructure. This year, among other things, we have increased to £600 the Good Condition Bonus, paid directly to customers who return their car in good order, while customers can also now add a third driver to their lease at no extra charge.

With more than half our customers now qualifying for the Scheme through Personal Independence Payment, we have experienced different challenges as we support customers with a wider variety of impairments, including mental health, psychological and neuro-linguistic conditions. We set out to make sure that our support and services are structured to support this breadth of needs.

Strategy

Our planning is based around four strategic pillars: to ensure long-term sustainability; to maintain consistently high levels of customer satisfaction; to provide a wide variety of vehicles at affordable prices; and to create improved awareness and understanding of the Scheme. During the year, we saw solid progress across all these areas, delivering high levels of customer service and affordability, underpinned by robust finances.

Focus on customers

Customer service is at the heart of our business, and this has been a year of strong performance. Independent six-monthly customer surveys rated satisfaction levels at 9.8 out of 10. Ninety-eight per cent of customers said they would recommend the Scheme to others, and nearly 92% chose to renew.

We also benchmark services through the Institute of Customer Service (ICS). This year the ICS once again recognised our customer service as the highest in our sector, with an exceptional score of 93.7%, compared with a sector average of 80.4%.

Motability Operations' services are rated particularly positively for ease of doing business. We appreciate that customers have complex and changing needs, and we approach each as an individual, looking to understand the specifics of their circumstances and requirements. Customer service advisers are trained to take ownership for the customer's issue, respond with empathy, and work flexibly to address their needs. We aim to resolve as many as possible of customer queries in one call, and over 90% of calls achieve this standard.

Looking ahead, we are planning to upgrade the support we provide through a major investment in online services. Our first online customer account is due by the end of December 2019. This year saw the first step in this new online journey with the delivery of an upgraded web-based tool for dealers handling applications. We have seen continuing development of our virtual assistant, which alongside webchat, enables customers to answer queries online. We also completed an extensive overhaul of the Scheme website, to provide a streamlined and simplified user experience, helping people get the information they need more quickly.

We continue to support customers who lose their allowance following their Department for Work and Pensions Assessment for Personal Independence Payment (PIP). During the year, over 7,000 Disability Living Allowance recipients lost eligibility for the Scheme, and returned their vehicle.

Currently, around 46% of working-age customers undergoing reassessment fail to qualify for the enhanced mobility rate of PIP. The Scheme also attracted around 72,000 new customers, who chose to use their allowance to lease a Motability car. This meant that following a period of slight decline, Scheme volumes began to grow again during the course of the year, finishing at 633,900.

We recognise the exceptional challenges facing those who lose access to the Scheme through changes to the allowance criteria. We support customers throughout this process offering advice as well as transitional support payments of up to £2,000 towards mobility needs.

Overall, the Scheme paid more than £14m in transitional support during the year. Customers who experience a stopped allowance for other reasons, such as a failed PIP-to-PIP assessment, will also now receive a transition payment of £1,000. This is covered by charitable funds supplied by Motability, the Charity (who determine policy on matters of support payments to those who lose eligibility).

PIP recipients comprise an ever-growing proportion of our customer base. By year end, we had around 329,000 PIP customers, some first time applicants, others transferring from Disability Living Allowance (DLA); they now make up more than half (52%) of our customers.

This transition brings new challenges as we engage with customers with a wider variety of conditions. In common with wider society, we see in addition more customers experiencing greater levels of depression and anxiety. We equip our teams with training and coaching to develop the right skills to support customers with diverse needs.

We work with a network of partners, including around 5,000 dealers, to deliver services to customers. Our objective is to offer consistently good service across the UK, and we provide training to help dealers become confident in meeting the needs of customers with a range of disabilities.

During the year we provided operational and disability confidence training for several thousand dealer Motability specialists, online and in the classroom. Early in 2019, we also held a series of dealer business briefings, attended by almost 3,000 dealer managers and specialists across the UK. Major topics included preparing for the development of online services, and understanding the implications of changes in our customer base.

The briefings were rated highly by attendees, who gave the events average scores of 92%. Nine out of ten said they planned to make changes as a result of attending, including making Motability signage more visible at their dealership.

In delivering the Scheme, we work closely with partner organisations, including RSA, Europcar, RAC and Kwik Fit. Over the year, we combined resources to improve experiences for customers requiring breakdown services or replacement cars, and further improvements are in the pipeline.

The year also saw increased satisfaction among our 16,500 powered wheelchair and scooter customers. All touch points rated at 90% or above in the Customer Satisfaction Survey. 96% of these customers now intend to renew, and 97% would recommend the Scheme to others.

“Our close partnership with disability organisations remains highly valued, and a number of individual briefings and visits took place through the year. We welcomed organisations at our Disability Organisations Forum in the summer, and more than 70 organisations receive our quarterly newsletter.”

For many customers, an adaptation can make driving possible, offering a huge boost to freedom and independence. We continue to make substantial investment in this area, to support those requiring extra levels of help. Adapted vehicles comprise around 10% of our fleet. In addition, we now have over 31,000 wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) on the fleet, and almost 2,000 ‘Drive from Wheelchair’ vehicles. During the year we invested around £22m in subsidies for adapted and converted vehicles.

Other initiatives aimed at supporting those with WAVs included the introduction of familiarisation visits, and annual checks, to make sure customers are comfortable with their vehicle, and the technical aspects remain sound.

Our series of summer events, known as One Big Days, provide an opportunity for customers and potential customers to find out more about adaptations and conversions, and the Scheme in general. Around 20,000 visitors attended this year's five shows, including Edinburgh this year, and we arranged 1,684 adapted test-drives. Passenger WAV ‘taster experiences’, which provided the opportunity to try out a WAV before committing to one for the long term, continued to be popular. We also added a test-drive track for visitors to try out scooters. Guests evaluated the events on average at 91%, with most saying they would follow up their attendance with a dealer visit.

Our close partnership with disability organisations remains highly valued, and a number of individual briefings and visits took place through the year. We welcomed organisations at our Disability Organisations Forum in the summer, and more than 70 organisations receive our quarterly newsletter. We also present regularly at the Joint Committee on Mobility and Disability. Feedback from these organisations helps us shape our services and meet the developing needs of customers.

Financial strength

This year has seen robust financial performance, with significant profits achieved in part from the continued strength of the used-car market. It was also agreed by the Board earlier in the year that, after evaluation of a range of factors, by year end, we would release capital reserves to a level £370m below the September 2018 Balance Sheet position.

The release of capital reserves, together with all of this year's profits, has enabled us to invest more than £100m in direct support to customers, as well as making a substantial donation of £852.3m to Motability, the Charity, to further support a wider group of people living with disabilities.

The donation requires Motability Operations to record a loss this year, but this does not affect our ability to meet our liabilities, and we remain in excellent financial health.

We have not changed our capital reserves policy. It remains critical that these are sustained at a level capable of withstanding severe economic shock. The reserves are used to fund cars, reducing our borrowing requirement and resulting in savings for our customers.

The release of reserves did impact our credit rating, with a rating downgrade announced by Standard and Poor's. This has reinforced the Board's view of the complexity of the business, and underlines that taking action in one area can have serious consequences in another.

Affordability for customers remained stable through the year, with more than 350 cars available at no more than the allowance. On average more than 200 cars were priced at less than the full allowance, allowing customers to keep some money back. Our investment is not only reflected in headline pricing; it also means that customers have obtained growing value from cars on the Scheme over the years. Higher-quality vehicles, and many additional features, are increasingly available, either for the allowance alone, or a small advance payment. Excellent relationships with the major manufacturers help us maintain choice and affordability.

The average purchase price of vehicles taken by customers this year is around 9% higher than in the previous year with no increase in the average additional customer contributions.

Our customer investment this year also included increasing the level of the bonus made to customers who bring their cars back in good order to £600. The bonus goes to around 94% of customers. In addition, we have augmented our support for wheelchair accessible vehicles and adaptations.

Our reinsurance captive, managed through a wholly owned subsidiary MO Reinsurance Ltd (MORL), delivers a highly effective insurance solution. MORL performed well this year and made an £11m profit. MORL is fully reserved to cope with volatility in claims.

Sustainability into the long term

Our culture sits at the heart of our business. Our people are passionate about our business, and their engagement is one of our most important measures. We evaluate engagement annually through a survey carried out for us by Willis Towers Watson, which benchmarks Motability Operations against the UK's highest-performing companies.

Once again this year we saw all divisions scoring ahead of the high-performing organisations benchmark in all 11 categories measured, with improvements made across all areas.

We aim to recruit and retain the talent needed to maintain our strong performance over the long term, including through our graduate, scholarship and internship programmes.

We invest in training and development, and plan carefully for succession. This helps us foster the right people and skills to determine our long-term success.

We continue to respond to changing expectations and society developments, with continuing evaluation of our work practices and office environment, including providing more creative space for team workshops, and greater availability of flexible working.

We keep employee engagement in our sights at all times, and act on feedback where we identify need for improvement. One such area was highlighted by the 2019 gender pay gap review. While we pay equally for equal roles, we have identified a mean gender pay gap of 29.6%. We are committed to addressing this. A range of initiatives already underway will build on our culture of diversity and inclusion, to create supportive environments for all employees.

Sustainability of our business needs the right infrastructure, and we continue to invest in IT development. Following the major upgrade onto the new Alfa leasing system completed in 2017, we have retired 14 legacy systems. Work has continued to replace and upgrade our online applications tool, pricing and vehicle remarketing systems.

The next few years will see us transform the way we interact with customers, business partners and stakeholders, using web-based platforms.

Another major investment is our new office, to be based near Edinburgh. Already operating in temporary premises, the new building will open in April 2020, and is expected to be the base for around 100 people in due course. The new office will provide extended operational capability for customer services and will provide us with the capacity for some of the customer base growth we expect in coming years.

For disability organisations in the region, the building will include space for local organisations to use the facilities to host meetings, training or events.

Well-defined governance and control processes enabled us to carefully manage financial and operational risks. A best-practice Risk Appetite Framework is now a firmly established cornerstone of our risk management processes.

“We work with a network of partners, including around 5,000 dealers, to deliver services to customers. Our objective is to offer consistently good service across the UK, and we provide training to help dealers become confident in meeting the needs of customers with a range of disabilities.”

National Audit Office

Our appetite for risk, the balance of reserves, and forecasting were key areas of focus for the National Audit Office (NAO), as it carried out a review of the Motability Scheme, published in December 2018.

We welcomed the review and were pleased to note that the NAO commended the excellent value for money and high levels of customer service we offer. It confirmed that Scheme prices were 44% below any market alternative for the period reviewed.

In line with an NAO recommendation, we recently completed a review of residual value (RV) forecasting, supported by third-party experts, to establish whether factors affecting past performance could be more accurately forecast in the future. We engaged with the NAO throughout the process.

I am pleased to note that the review has concluded that Motability Operations' RV forecasting approach is appropriate and effective. Third-party forecasting experts, Cambridge Econometrics have established that there was no evidence of systemic bias that resulted in either under- or over-forecasting.

The review found that variations between forecast and outcomes were largely driven by unexpectedly buoyant markets, the effects of which were experienced across the wider industry.

We continue to work with Motability as it carries out its review of the performance framework for the Scheme (as recommended by the NAO), including targets linked to Motability Operations' Executive Director remuneration.

Outlook

A number of challenges set the backdrop for next year, including the continuing impact of welfare reform, and the changing expectations of our customer base. There were early signs of a more difficult used-car market in the final weeks of the financial year, setting the expectation of tougher conditions in 2019/20. We could potentially see further pressures on Sterling as the UK focuses on establishing future trading relationships.

Despite this, we see many exciting opportunities on the horizon. These include the delivery of our ambitious digital and IT agenda; ensuring that we devote appropriate resources to raising greater awareness and understanding of the Scheme; addressing demands for greater choice around environmentally sustainable travel; and continuing our working relationship with the Scottish government, as well as launching our new office in Edinburgh.

As this is my last full year as CEO, I'd like to use this opportunity to pay tribute to those people that I've worked with over the years: partners; suppliers; disability organisations; Lord Sterling and the governors and employees of Motability, the Charity; and our Board. It has been hugely rewarding to engage with so many interesting and inspiring people.

In particular, I'd like to thank all those special colleagues who have been so supportive to me during my time at Motability Operations. These are the people who have strived tirelessly to meet the needs of our customers, to address the interests of our stakeholders, and who have shaped the business to the position it holds today. It has been a privilege to be part of this exceptional organisation, and its success is a credit to their passion and dedication.



Mike Betts
Chief Executive

“As this is my last full year as CEO, I'd like to use this opportunity to pay tribute to those people that I've worked with over the years: partners; suppliers; disability organisations; Lord Sterling and the governors and employees of Motability, the Charity; and our Board.”

Sustainability

We have retired 14 legacy systems as part of the planned roadmap ensuring that we have the right IT infrastructure to support long-term sustainability and enable enhancements in how we interact with customers, partners and stakeholders.

New jobs

We have made a major investment in a new office near Edinburgh, which will be the base for around 100 new jobs in due course, focused on providing additional capacity for customer services.