

POST OFFICE NETWORK CHANGE PROGRAMME – BRIEFING NOTE

October 2007

BACKGROUND

The Government has recognised the need to modernise and reshape the Post Office network against the backdrop of falling customers numbers, decline in traditional services, changing consumer behaviour and rising losses in the network, now at £4m a week. In May 2007 the Government announced:

1. The proposed closure of up to 2,500 branches (out of 14,300 currently)
2. The introduction of minimum access criteria in respect of the remaining branches.
3. Future Government support funding for the network.
4. The introduction of 500 'outreach' branches.

Post Office Ltd is required to maintain a network against the following minimum access criteria:

1. 99% of the population to be within 3 miles and 90% of the population to be within 1 mile of a Post Office.
2. 99% of the population in deprived urban areas to be within 1 mile of a Post Office.
3. 95% of the urban population to be within 1 mile of a Post Office.
4. 95% of the rural population to be within 3 miles of a Post Office.
5. For each postcode district, 95% of the population of the postcode to be within 6 miles of a Post Office.

Post Office Ltd is also required to take into consideration the physical environment, availability of public transport and alternative access to key services, local demographics and the impact on local economies when reviewing the network.

Government are expecting Post Office Ltd to implement the changes during an 18 month period. The Country has been divided into 50 areas which each have a local plan which will each be subject to a detailed planning process which will be subject to a public consultation starting in March 2008 for 6 weeks.

Post Office Ltd has divided the country into 50 district areas for which there will each be a local plan to implement the changes. Each local district area will be subject to a detailed planning process through which the future of the Network proposals will be developed which will be subject to consultation before implementation.

Throughout the planning and consultation process, Postwatch the independent watchdog for the postal service will scrutinise and comment on the Post Office Ltd's proposals.

In February 2007, the Norfolk Rural Community Council (NRCC) produced a report called 'From Post Office Closures to Enterprising Communities'. This report recommended the creation of viable and sustainable (not reliant on Public Funding) Community Hubs in which



the Post Office role could be incorporated. Further information can be provided by the NRCC by contacting Peter Smith on 01362 698216.

IMPACT

The closure of any Post Office will be unsettling and a loss to that community. This will be felt even harder in rural communities. Although there will be an economic impact, the loss of a community service will probably be the greatest issue. In rural areas, such as Breckland the Post Office subsidy income usually supplements a retail income such as a grocery or newsagent. It is possible that without the Post Office the remaining business is not viable and could close. The knock on impact of the loss of not just a Post Office but also the local shop could be severe in rural areas.

It is not just the number of people using a Post Office, access is the key criteria for Post Office Ltd however the car is usually the only access in Norfolk and therefore to travel further means more use of a car which is not environmentally friendly.

FURTHER CONTACT

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