

in

Post Office Closures Briefing

This briefing outlines the Post Office Network Change Programme, explains the timescales and how to respond.

Introduction

The Government has recognised that fewer people are using the Post Office branches, partly because traditional services, including benefit payments and other services are now available in other ways. The Government concluded that the overall size and shape of the Post Office branches network needs to change.

In May 2007, following a national public consultation, the Government proposed a range of measures to modernise and reshape the Post Office branches network (the Network) to provide a more sustainable future for remaining post offices and their customers.

Post Office Ltd has now put in place a Network Change Programme to implement the measures proposed by the Government. The programme includes:

- Compulsory compensated closures of up to 2,500 Post Office branches (subject to EU State Aid clearance) out of a network of 14,300 branches. Compensation will be paid to those subpostmasters whose branches are compulsorily closed under the Network Change Programme.
- The introduction of about 500 new service points known as Outreaches in some areas to mitigate the impact of the proposed closures. For example, a mobile Post Office branch service.

What is Post Office Limited proposing for the UK?

The Government has decided that up to 2,500 post offices throughout the UK should close because of increasing financial losses and falling customer numbers. One of the ways the Government will make sure people continue to have access to the best possible access to post office services is to set minimum access criteria.

Post Office Ltd is responsible for deciding which post offices will close in both rural and urban areas. Post Office Ltd claims that 90% of customers will continue to use the same post office and the majority of Post Office branches - more than 80% - will not change as a result of the programme.

Post Office Ltd is adopting an area-by-area approach to closures. Each area plan will be subject to 6 weeks local public consultation. The closures will take place up to the end of 2008.

The criteria used to determine the proposed post office closures are:

Nationally:

- 99% of the UK population to be within 3 miles and 90% of the population to be within 1 mile of their Post Office® outlet
- 99% of the total population in deprived urban areas across the UK to be within 1 mile of their nearest Post Office® outlet
- 95% of the total urban population across the UK to be within 1 mile of their nearest Post Office® outlet

- 95% of the total rural population across the UK to be within 3 miles of their nearest Post Office® outlet

In addition, for each individual postcode district:

- 95% of the population of the postcode district to be within 6 miles of their nearest Post Office® outlet

For more information on Post Office Ltd's area proposals visit www.postoffice.co.uk/networkchange or telephone 08457 22 33 44. Area plan proposal information is available in an alternative format for people who are visually impaired.

What is the situation in East & West Sussex?

Post Office Ltd is producing two area plan proposals for East & West Sussex based on parliamentary constituencies, which will be published on different dates.

The Sussex Area Plan was published by Post Office Ltd on 13 November 2007. This plan covers all of East Sussex and most of West Sussex. The area plan sets out the proposed post office closures and gives details of 2 new outreach services. The plan also lists the two alternative post office branches nearest to the post office branch proposed for closure for people to use.

There will be a 6 week consultation finishing on 24 December 2007, during which time people can respond.

234 post offices will be retained, 2 new outreach services developed and 49 post offices will close. The complete list of all the proposed Sussex post office closures is attached. It can also be found on www.postoffice.co.uk/networkchange

The Surrey, Berks and West Sussex area plan, covers the rest of West Sussex and will be published on 29 January 2008, with a 6 week consultation period.

Post offices proposed for closure will be displaying posters and have leaflets available. Once the 6 week consultation has finished, Post Office Ltd will take approximately 3-4 weeks to review peoples' comments. Post Office Ltd will then publish their revised area post office closure list for people to comment on.

How can communities or individuals get involved and comment on Post Office Ltd's proposals?

Please note that Post Office Ltd is not consulting on whether or not they should proceed with their closure programme. The closure programme has already been approved by Government and Post Office Ltd will be closing 2,500 post offices UK wide by the end of 2008.

Post Office Ltd's current consultation process focuses on how their specific area-by-area proposals will affect people.

In responses to Post Office Ltd's consultation, you will need to explain how you and/or your community may be adversely affected by the closure of your local post office. Post Office Ltd has assessed all the post office branches proposed for closure, but they may not be aware of ***specific local issues*** or future plans for your area.

Issues you may wish to consider are:

- How might it impact on the social fabric of your community?
- How might it affect the local economy? Will local businesses, particularly small businesses, be adversely affected e.g. posting mail & packages?
- How might the overall viability of the community be impacted upon, especially if the post office is located within another outlet; will the loss of the post office deter people from using other shops/businesses?
- How might it affect older people, people with disabilities or young families? Is your post office near to sheltered housing, a school or the Drs surgery? Does your village have a high proportion of older people?
- How easy would it be to access the suggested alternative post offices – is there a frequent bus service; easy parking; access for people with disabilities, e.g. wide doors/pathways. Are the suggested opening times/days convenient; can you safely walk or cycle there; what is the location like, e.g. is it very steep; has no street pavements or lighting?
- Geography - are there any physical barriers, e.g. roads, rivers, railway lines etc
- Can you still access the range of services you had at the post office proposed for closure from other outlets, e.g. access to cash-points?
- Can the suggested alternative post offices, cope with additional users?
- Future developments, e.g. new shops, schools, housing, better transport connections?
- Does the 6 week consultation period give you enough time to fully respond?
- Where is your nearest post box, is it a wide mouthed one for large envelopes? Often when a post office closes the linked post box is also removed – you may not want this to happen.

Should we do a petition?

Petitions demonstrate peoples' strength of feeling, but bear in mind that Post Office Ltd knows the actual usage of their post offices. In addition, petitions do not specifically address the points Post Office Ltd are consulting on. These are:

- Accessibility
 - Distance from suggested alternative post offices and access to them. The Government's criteria are 3 miles for rural areas and 1 mile for urban areas.
- Transport provision – the type and availability of public transport
- Geography
- Local demographics, including deprivation levels
- Impact on local economies

Who should we write to?

Your views and comments should be sent in writing, before the **24 December 2007** deadline, to:

Gary Herbert
Network Development Manager
C/o National Consultation Team
FREEPOST CONSULTATION TEAM

E-mail consultation@postoffice.co.uk

It would also be helpful if you could send copies of your Post Office Ltd responses to the following organisations:

Action in Rural Sussex (Please note you will need to pay postage!)
212 High Street
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 2NH
E-mail info@ruralsussex.org.uk

Postwatch
Freepost Postwatch
E-mail info@postwatch.co.uk

Who else should I contact?

Post Office Ltd is the main source of information on these network changes. Contact them on www.postoffice.co.uk/networkchange or telephone 08457 22 33 44.

Postwatch, the independent consumer watchdog for postal services, can be contacted on 08456 013265 or 028 9027 9348, e-mailed at info@postwatch.co.uk or written to at Freepost Postwatch. Their website is www.postwatch.co.uk

Action in rural Sussex (AirS), regarding rural post offices. We will be collecting and collating information about the closure procedures to highlight particular rural issues. We will be seeking to ensure that there are no further post office closure programmes by assisting communities to identify issues early on and by maintaining a dialogue with Post Office Ltd.

Local Authorities:

Alan Batty, Head of Democratic Services, Lewes District Council, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2LX. Tel 01273 471600

Brenda Mason, Head of Policy and Performance, Rother District Council, Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN39 3JX. Tel 01424 787860

Gill Cameron-Waller, Policy & Partnerships Manager, Wealden District Council, Vicarage Lane, Hailsham, East Sussex, BN27 2AX. Tel 01323 443745

Ana Fajardo, Economic Development Manager, West Sussex County Council, County Hall, West Street, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1RQ Tel 01243 777 606

ViRSA, the Village Retail Services Association and **RSA**, the Rural Shops Alliance may also be able to help provide advice to rural shops.