

Post Office Update

The Bath & North East Somerset Council through its Enterprise and Economic Development Panel, made a formal response to the proposed changes developed by the Post Office Ltd. This was submitted on April 8th. Since this date there has been no feedback from Post Office Ltd on any of our recommendations.

Response was submitted in two parts:

- 1) In relation to the generality of the proposals
- 2) The response also provided detailed comments in the document relating to individual proposals.

1) General Concerns

- Regarding the process of the consultation and decision making, and has identified many inaccuracies in the way that the consultation was conducted.
- Restructuring of Royal Mail by the Government into individual business has deliberately isolated the Post Office and identified it as a loss making business.
- The Panel also suggests that awareness of the Post Office 'brand' is lacking and that it could have been marketed far more effectively.
- The Panel is also very aware that the Equalities Impact Assessment and Sustainability (Race Relations Amendment Act 2006 updated to Equality Act 2006) has not been taken into account.

The Elderly & Disabled

- There are a number of issues involving access to alternative Post Offices. i.e. nearby parking at some of the alternative branches is a notable concern.
- The topography of the areas has not been investigated fully and has been neglected within the proposals.
- A sufficient degree of 'value' has not been considered or placed on the significance of the Post Office to a community.
- Concern with the loss of social interaction that the Post Office provides to the local community.

Affect of closure on local business

- Branch closure will impact on the sustainability of the associated business. It will also detrimentally affect businesses that rely on their local Post Office network to deliver and receive parcels. Neighbouring shops are also likely to see a reduction in trade.
- *Results from the on line Council's Post Office consultation survey:*

One of the main issues that residents were worried about was the effect on local business coupled by the effect of regeneration in the area.

- The Panel also acknowledges that not all Post Offices are as economically viable as others.

The value of the local Post Office within the Community

- The economic and social value of the local Post Office within the community has not been taken into account.
- The government standpoint on these closures is contrary to their national policies such as improving the carbon footprint, improving the local community.
- In this plan Post Office Ltd has abrogated its social responsibility on this matter.
- it's critical for the need to think about the long term particularly for rural and urban communities:-
 - a. It is recommended that detailed discussions are needed with the sub postmasters affected.
 - b. This is NOT a voluntary process, but many sub postmasters may welcome the compensation package. Parish Councils are a glaring omission NOT being part of the statutory consultation.
 - c. There is a need to think about future national and local policy in the longer term.
- The Post Office is often the first social opportunity for young children to socially interact in commerce.

The concern about increase in the carbon footprint

- Part of the National Government and the EU's current policy is the reduction of the carbon footprint. This has not been taken into account within the consideration of these proposed closures.
- The move to an alternative branch could increase the need to use private vehicles and public transport, if any were available. Therefore, Post Office users would be using more fuel, and create a lot more road traffic and thus increasing CO2, which the Government is trying to reduce.
- A number of the local bus routes have been cut by First Group for not being environmentally economic. There is a lack of co-ordination between the proposals for closure and the First Group identified on viable bus routes.

Increasing deprivation

- .It is difficult to define but there are small pockets of rural deprivation in areas that are classified as wealthy that have not been considered.

- Pockets of Clandown & Park Estate have been reported as 'a most deprived area' based on income deprivation figures for the area. Although they are not the most deprived areas in B&NES, they are the most deprived area where a Post Office is due for closure.

Public concerns specific to individual areas/Post Offices in B&NES

- The lack of disabled access at some or all of the alternative/nearest branches to which customers will be expected to migrate, and the absence of low floor/wheelchair access on the bus routes travelling to alternative branches.
- There are branch closures located in areas where there are no direct bus services to the first or second alternative branch.
- The pressure of additional custom will lead to longer queues/transaction times in the central Post Office (already severely pressed at key times), and the alternative Post Offices.
- The impact on local economies where a branch is connected to a shop/village store or part of a larger shopping complex.
- The concern about the increase in traffic congestion in central Bath as a result of more people using the Crown Post Office, particularly during peak times.

Strategies for coping with closure

The Panel stresses a concern that the Post Office has no strategy for transition period. The Panel suggest the following strategies for consideration:-

- *Helping to maintain viable village shops*
- *Scope for community owned shops:*
- *Thinking of other ways of meeting service needs:* i.e. 'One Stop Shop'.
- *Village hubs and community self-help.* i.e. outreach points.
- *Making sure that the issue stays on the agenda* i.e. local Government funding.