

A guide to Banking Hubs

October 2022

What is a banking hub?

A Banking Hub is a shared banking space, similar to a traditional bank branch but available to everyone. The hubs currently consist of a counter service that will be operated by Post Office staff, where customers of any bank can withdraw and deposit cash, make bill payments can carry out regular banking transactions. In addition, there will be private spaces where customers can speak to someone from their own bank about more complex issues. The banks will be working on a rotating basis, so there will be staff from different banks available on different days.

What services will the hubs provide?

Banking hubs will offer basic counter services, allowing people to withdraw funds, make cash, change and cheque deposits, pay bills and make balance enquiries. Automated services for deposits and withdrawals will also be available.

On alternating days, bank staff from specific banks will be available so people can speak to their own bank about problems or other banking issues they may need help with.

Over time, our hubs will develop to meet the needs of the communities using them, as we learn more about the services people need and adapt to the changes initiated by the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

What other services are available to people who need access to cash?

As well as the banking hubs, communities in every part of the UK need access to cash. There are a range of existing services that are being expanded or others that have been recently launched, including:

- Free ATMs
- Post Office counter services
- Free deposit/SME business services
- Cashback without purchase

How many hubs are planned?

So far, 25 Banking Hubs have launched, are launching soon or are underway. We are expecting the next ten hubs to open their doors within months. Yet this is just the first wave in the rollout of hubs around the UK and is part of a longer-term vision for cash access on the high street.

It's clear there's a great demand for the Banking Hubs and other services that allow people to access their cash around the UK. So we hope to have up hundreds of hubs in place in the coming few years.

Who will staff the banking hubs and how will they be sourced/trained?

Banks will ensure staff are available to work in the hubs on specific days of the week. So people will be able to check when their own bank staff will be in the branch and can go in and speak to them. Anyone will be able to use our Post Office staffed counter services any day that the Hub is open.

People using the hubs will be able to speak to fully trained and experienced staff from each bank who will be able to provide the same support and banking advice as you'd expect from a traditional branch.

Will the staff be able to help resolve problems and complaints?

Banks all have the same process for dealing with complaints and sorting out problems, from errors to financial difficulties, under existing financial services regulations. Branch staff will be able to offer advice and support in-house – and direct people to the departments that can sort out the problem or resolve any complaints.

How will the banking hubs help more vulnerable people?

The Access to Cash Group has conducted extensive research to ensure that any proposals will meet the requirements of older or more vulnerable people in every community.

As the pandemic highlighted, many vulnerable people are left isolated and unable to obtain cash or get help with their finances for a range of circumstances. Being able to speak to trained and experienced members of banking staff in a secure environment is very important to people in these circumstances. The needs of carers and people holding Power of Attorney are also significantly addressed by a face-to-face service.

Accessibility isn't just about availability. After all, if the only free ATM in a five-mile radius is up a steep hill, many people will not be able to use it independently. Part of the Access to Cash program is to ensure that all of these factors in each unique community are included in to our future planning.

How long does it take to set up and launch a hub?

Creating new services does take time, and we are going as fast as humanly possible, from a standing start in January 2021. Since our trial launches, it's taking roughly 12 months to set up each branch. But with every hub we develop and launch, we're speeding up the process. There will always be complexities with each Banking Hub, but we're confident we will be speeding up this process as much as we can – especially with the support of the local community.

Setting up a Banking Hub generally involves two phases

- First six months: During this period we work in the local community to find and agree a suitable, accessible location for the Banking Hub and agree the lease.
- Second six months: This begins when the lease is signed. We'll start to tell people from the local community that the hub is coming soon. We kit out the branch and finally train our staff in the final month before the launch.

While the first six-month period is the most unpredictable in terms of timescales, the final six months builds in extra time for unexpected events (issues with the lease, building problems, etc) but in all likelihood, the launch date will be much sooner than the 'official' timescale.

We are taking an ambitious approach to the clear need for the Banking Hubs around the UK. As soon as we announce a new tranche of hubs we're already working on the next ones. In the next two years, we hope to have hundreds of branches in place.

How do you decide which communities need a banking hub or cash services?

There are two ways that new hubs are created. Whenever a bank makes a change to its network (such as a branch closure or reduced opening hours) it needs to notify LINK in advance. LINK will then assess the location's needs, looking at what other services are available locally, the size of the location (people and number of shops) and determine whether the community needs a new hub. The criteria that LINK uses have been developed and agreed after extensive consumer and small business group input, and is operated independently of the banks.

In addition, a community can also request a review itself. LINK will then independently assess the needs of that community using the same criteria. Any community can ask for a review – the form is on LINK's website: <https://www.link.co.uk/consumers/request-access-to-cash/>. Barton-upon-Humber in Lincolnshire is our first announced hub that will be created after the community requested the service.

LINK, the Post Office and other cash services available now

Banking hubs are not the only solution to the problem of access to cash. We believe it's vitally important for consumers to have access to a range of services so they can get cash when they need it, including outside of traditional banking hours. Some of these options include:

The LINK network and providing access to cash

[The LINK cash locator](#) can help people locate where they can access cash in their local neighbourhood by postcode, including resources such as:

- Free ATMs
- Free cashback without purchase
- Post Office counter services

- ATMs that disperse £5 notes
- Deposit services
- Coin deposit services
- Foreign currency deposit services
- ATMs and cashback services (chargeable)

The site also identifies where services are available to support people who might need specific help, like wheelchair accessibility and audio assistance.

Cashback without purchase

LINK launched the 'cashback without purchase' initiative in November 2021 after a year-long successful trial. While many people will be familiar with the concept of 'cashback' – asking a retailer to provide them with cash as part of a purchase - they may also remember that this was often at the retailer's discretion. Many people felt compelled to make a purchase in order to ask for cash.

Cashback without purchase offers exactly that – cashback on request, without strings. Best of all, the scheme is available in 8,000 shops that use [PayPoint](#) as their cash services provider.

PayPoint has 28,000 locations nationwide and allows retailers using the system to take bill payments, collect parcels (Collect +) and other services that will be familiar to millions of people. Many of the retailers are small, local shops that people particularly affected by the cost-of-living crisis rely on and use for other counter services like purchasing credit for pre-payment energy meters.

Post Office Counters

Post Office is the UK's largest retail network with over 11,500 branches within 3 miles of 99.7% of the population.

This makes the Post Office the largest branch-based network where people can access their cash. Over 120 million transactions on behalf of 27 high street banks took place in 2018. People can currently use the following services at the Post Office:

- Cash withdrawals
- Paying in cash and cheques
- Balance enquiries
- International transfers

The Post Office is a vital service for many people struggling to access their cash. However, it cannot be expected to be the only alternative for people who need face-to-face banking services. The Post Office will be providing counter services in the new Banking Hubs, alongside staff from the individual banks that operated most commonly in the local community.