

REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE		Report No. 11
Date of Meeting	17 th January 2008	
Title of Report	Post Office Closures	
Portfolio	Leisure & Economy	
Link to Corporate Priorities	Support a diverse & thriving economy.	
Key Decision	No	
Executive Workplan Ref	None	
Public Report	Yes	

Summary of Report

To provide background on the consultation carried out by the Government on proposals to introduce criteria which enabled them to develop local plans which has informed which 2500 Post Offices will be closed nationally.

As a result of this consultation it has been proposed that seven North Wiltshire Post Offices are closed and a further three branches must put forward plans for the provision of an outreach service.

Officer Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- 1. Consideration is given to whether the District Council wishes to respond to the consultation given that responses will be coming from each of the branches that are to close or become an outreach service (with the support of the Village Shops Advisor) and from the County Council. (NB: If a response is to come from NWDC, then comments should be received by the 25th January to enable officers to respond to the consultation).**
- 2. Consideration is given to how the District Council can help the communities that will be affected by these closures.**

Other than those implications agreed with the relevant Officers and referred to below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Community & Environmental Implications	Human Resources Implications	Equality & Diversity Implications
None	None	Yes	None	None

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Government (DTI) has been tasked to modernise and reshape the Post Office network and has developed access criteria and developed local plans which has enabled the Post Office Ltd to decide which 2,500 branches in the UK will be closed. Compensation will be paid to those sub-postmasters whose branches are compulsorily closed under the Programme.
- 1.2 The Programme also requires that about 500 branches will have to introduce new service points known as "Outreaches to mitigate the impact of the proposed closures.

2. Options and Options Appraisal

- 2.1 Option 1: The District Council responds to the consultation and gives consideration as to how it can provide assistance to communities that will be affected.
- 2.2 Option 2: The District Council does not respond but supports the responses of individual branches (with the help of Community First) and Wiltshire County Council and gives consideration as to how it can provide assistance to the communities affected.

3. Background Information

- 3.1 With changes in technology, a wider choice of ways to access services and changing lifestyles, people have been visiting post offices less and the network is making a loss which cannot be sustained.
- 3.2 On the 14th December 2006 the Government (Department of Trade & Industry), initiated a 12 week public consultation on a range of proposed measures to modernise and reshape the current network.
- 3.3 A series of new access criteria was proposed to protect vulnerable customers in deprived urban and rural areas. Most pertinent to North Wiltshire is that in rural areas 95% of the total population must be located within 3 miles of a post office (full details of the criteria can be found at appendix 1).
- 3.4 As part of the proposed changes, some branches have been asked to adopt new business models including the provision of outreach services. There are four possible types of outreach service which are as follows:
 - **Mobile Service**, located in a van and operated by a core sub-postmaster and will visit small communities at set days & times.
 - **Hosted Service**, a fixed Post Office site from which a core sub-postmaster offers restricted products, services and opening hours. This could be in premises owned by a third party such as a pub, shop or village hall.
 - **Partner Service**, a fixed Post Office site where a local partner (such as a pub landlord) transacts certain Post Office products and services from his premises during his opening hours.
 - **Home Service**, for very small communities where the sub-postmaster delivers a reduced range of services ordered by telephone. Products are delivered either to the customer's home or to a local drop off point.
- 3.5 Restructuring of the network has been undertaken within the framework of the access criteria.

- 3.6 Post Office Ltd were asked to develop local plans that fitted within the framework and as a result of this decided which 2500 branches were to be closed nationally.
- 3.7 North Wiltshire District Council responded to the original consultation on the 8th March 2007. A copy of the response can be found at appendix 2.

4. Area Plan Proposal for West Berkshire & Wiltshire

- 4.1 A Local Area Plan Proposal has been developed for West Berkshire and Wiltshire which provides information on the changes proposed. (See appendix 3).
- 4.2 When developing the plan, Post Office Ltd analysed a number of factors. These included the proximity of the Post Office branches proposed for closure to other nearby branches, the number of customers currently using the branch, the size and ability of nearby branches to absorb extra customers and the commercial implications of any decision for Post Office Ltd.
- 4.3 Post Office Ltd has also taken into account the availability of public transport, alternative access to key Post Office services, local demographics and the impact on local economies.
- 4.4 Postwatch, the independent consumer watchdog for postal services has worked with Post Office Ltd in assessing the options for change during the period leading up to publication of the plan and has also engaged with other stakeholders including MPs.
- 4.5 Each Area Plan Proposal is subject to local public consultation to ensure that the views of local people are taken into consideration. Consultation commenced on the 11th December 2007 and ends on the 31st January 2008.

5. Responses to the Consultation

- 5.1 A meeting with elected members from each of the Districts was called by Wiltshire County Council in mid December and Post Office Ltd gave a presentation on the background to the proposed changes to the Post Office network and the Local Area Plan proposal. Officers from Wiltshire County Council are working on an assessment of each of the branches proposed for closure. This is likely to be available during the week beginning the 7th January and will be circulated in due course.
- 5.2 Tim Coomber, the Village Shops Co-ordinator employed by Community First (and part funded by NWDC) will be visiting all of the post offices that are affected in North Wiltshire to offer advice and assistance. He will be looking at the proposals and area plans to see if any mistakes have been made and will help the parish councils to put objections forward if appropriate. He feels that hard evidence will be needed to persuade Post Office Ltd to keep a branch open and if the objection succeeds, then another branch will have to close in its place.
- 5.3 Those Post Offices that are required to provide an outreach service will be working with the Village Shops Advisor to see how this could be done.
- 5.4 The Village Shops Advisor feels that it is preferable for the response to the consultation to come from the local communities on an individual basis, as this is likely to be more effective and targeted. Any response will need to be backed up by hard evidence.

- 5.5 West Wiltshire District Council is leaving Community First to respond to the consultation as like North Wiltshire District Council, it also financially supports the Village Shops Advisor post.
- 5.6 Community Development Officers at Kennet District Council would only get involved if they receive a request for support from the Post Offices. To date they have had no such request.
- 5.7 Details of the consultation have been sent to Local Strategic Partnership members by the LSP Manager at the District Council.

6. Community and Environmental Implications

- 6.1 The closure of Post Office and changes in the service provision are likely to have a negative impact on communities.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1 There is a risk that a response given by the District Council may conflict with other responses coming from the Post Offices themselves which will have a more in depth knowledge of the issues involved.
- 7.2 If the District Council does not respond to the consultation it will not have the opportunity to voice its opinions on an issue affecting communities in the district. A response against the decision to close Post Office branches may have some influence on the outcome.
- 7.3 Local communities may suffer from the withdrawal or change to Post Office services in their village and may suffer further if no help is available.

Appendices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 – Post Office Network Consultation Document – December 2006 • 2 – NWDC’s Response to Consultation Document. • 3 – Local Area Plan Proposal Prepared by the Post Office
Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

Previous Decisions Connected with this Report

Report	Committee & Date	Minute Reference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on Position Regarding Post Office Closures 	Executive – 7/6/07	E17