

Democratic Services
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Report

To : Western Area Committee
From : Paul Trenell
Date : 10th January 2008
Subject : Post Office Closures

1. Background

The list of proposed Post Office closures for West Berkshire and Wiltshire was released on 11th December 2007. Further details on the closure programme can be accessed via:

<http://www.postoffice.co.uk/portal/po/jump2?catId=63400714&mediaId=57600693>

The consultation period has been extended to 10 weeks, meaning the deadline for responses is now 31st January 2008. This report is intended to inform the response of the Western Area Committee to the consultation.

2. Reason for closures

The Government has claimed that the current Post Office network is unsustainable because people have begun to use Post Offices differently. Alterations to the way in which key services such as pension payments, television licensing and car tax are accessed and the rise in internet use has resulted in 4 million fewer people using Post Offices each week compared to just three years ago. Despite an annual Government subsidy of £150 million the Post Office network is losing around £4 million a week. The national closure programme is an attempt to address this problem.

3. Branches affected

The only affected Post Office within the western area is Broad Chalke (South St, SP5 5DH) which is proposed for an 'outreach' service rather than outright closure.

3. Outreach

An 'outreach' service entails the replacement of the branch with an alternative service. This alternative service will take one of four forms:

- Mobile Service: A mobile Post Office which visits a set location at set times and days.
- Hosted Service: A fixed Post Office branch from which the core subpostmaster or his assistants provide certain services during restricted hours. The site is owned by a third party such as a community centre or shop.
- Partner Service: A local partner (such as a pub landlord or newsagent) transacts services *on behalf of* the subpostmaster during the opening hours of their business.
- Home Service: For very small communities. The core subpostmaster delivers Post Office products which are ordered over the telephone by customers. There will be no physical Post Office building in the community.

The consultation invites feedback as to which outreach service would be most appropriate in each affected area.

4. Options for Consideration:

The committee has the opportunity to respond on to the public consultation. At time of writing specific details of how each branch would be affected are limited. The Democratic Services Officer is to undertake further research into each proposed closure, with the aim of determining the services likely to be lost and the feelings of the relevant subpostmaster. He will also take responsibility for coordinating and drafting any response. It would be appreciated if each councillor in an affected ward would take responsibility for gauging the feeling of residents with relation to the closure and the likely impact on the community, and for relaying this information to the Democratic Services Officer. Any relevant information that can contribute to an informed consultation response would be welcomed.

A further issue is that there is no scheduled meeting of the Western Area Committee before the deadline of 31st January. For ease of coordination and to ensure that the response deadline is met it is suggested that the committee elect a delegate or delegates to take responsibility for consulting with the Democratic Services Officer in the composition of any response and for approving the final responses on behalf of the committee. The member for the affected ward would be a logical candidate for this position, but nominations will not be restricted.

5. Recommendation(s): That:

- (1) the committee determine whether it wishes to submit a consultation response and if so what response;
- (2) the drafting of any response is to be produced by the Democratic Services Officer in consultation with relevant members to be determined by the committee.

6. Background Papers:

Post Office Ltd, *Network Change Programme – Area Plan Proposal for West Berkshire and Wiltshire* (December 2007)

Wiltshire County Council, *Post Office Closures – Briefing Note* (December 2007)

Department of Trade and Industry, *The Post Office Network – Government Response to Public Consultation* (May 2007)

7. Implications:

Financial : None

Legal: The council has adequate powers to pursue this issue.

Human Rights: The council is making no decision that would impact directly on any persons Human Rights.

Council's Core Values: Supports all.