

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

BRIEFING PAPER for meeting to be held on 22 May 2008

Post Office Network Change Programme

1) The Post Office Area Plan Proposal for Norfolk and West Suffolk was released for local public consultation on 26 March 2008. The full consultation document can be found at the following website address: -
<http://www.postoffice.co.uk/portal/po/content1?catId=57600693&mediaId=57600697>. As you will be aware the following Post Offices in Norwich are proposed for closure: -

North Earlham Post Office, 308 Bowthorpe Road

Rosary Road Post Office, 114 Rosary Road

Vauxhall Street Post Office, 24 Suffolk Square

2) Representatives from the Post Office will be attending today's meeting to explain the basis on which their proposals have been made and answer detailed questions. A copy of the question plan that has been sent to the Post Office representatives to help them prepare for the meeting is attached at Appendix 1.

3) The Council's Performance and Research Officer has undertaken an initial check of the data used by the Post Office in reaching their proposals. The results of this exercise are attached at appendix 2.

4) This Committee is asked to decide whether they wish to make any recommendations to the Executive on 28 May in terms of any formal representations to be submitted by the Council on the proposed closures. The closing date for responding to the consultation is 2 June, 2008.

Contact Details:-

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Question Plan for Post Office Representatives

Scope of Review

To consider how the proposed closures will affect the residents of Norwich with a view to agreeing a draft response to the consultation for submission to the Executive.

Questions

- Would anybody's quality of life be adversely affected by the suggested closures?

In terms of the process:

- Have previous closures been taken into consideration?
- What checks have been made to ensure that all the information which has been used in deciding which post offices to close has been accurate?
- To what extent has planned housing and retail development in the localities been taken into account?
- In terms of the specific closures proposed for Norwich how have the wider issues of accessibility (physical access, range of stock, queues, opening hours etc) been assessed both for post offices proposed for closure and proposed alternatives?
- What are the implications for nearby post offices of deciding to retain a post office currently proposed for closure?

Alternatives:

- What proof is there that the post offices suggested for closure are/are not financially viable?
- Could these post offices be made more viable (eg by government insisting that all post offices are allowed to offer all services, such as road tax, for example).
- What consideration has been given to the financial viability of the remaining post offices with particular reference to proposed alternatives in order to avoid a situation whereby a profitable post office is closed and the proposed alternative is more heavily subsidised leaving it more vulnerable to future closure either through retirement/general business failure or a further round of closures in the future?
- Have the current plans of the remaining postmasters been taken into account as some may have plans to retire soon and may be difficult to find a replacement especially given the current cutbacks?

- Could the post offices be run in other ways, eg by the Council?
- Is active consideration being given to the possibilities of post offices in shops/pubs etc
- What is being proposed in other parts of the Country?

Appendix 2

Post Office Closure Consultation – Data Checking Exercise

1. In order to satisfy ourselves that, in relation to Norwich, Post Office Ltd were basing their proposals on a sound statistical basis, a quick technical exercise has been carried out to check relevant data.
2. Assessment of the following data were carried out:
 - Network Change Programme: Area Plan Proposal Norfolk and West Suffolk – minimum access criteria
 - Network Change Programme; Appendix
3. Within the Area Plan Proposal there is a “minimum access criteria”. These are actually national criteria. Those relevant to Norwich are:

Nationally:

- 90% of the population to be within 1 mile of their nearest Post Office branch
 - 99% of the total population in deprived urban areas across the UK to be within 1 mile
 - 95% of the total urban population across the UK to be within 1 mile
4. This is difficult to measure and we are checking what methodology was actually used.
 5. A similar measure is used in the Index of Deprivation though this doesn't strictly tell you what proportion of the population are within a certain distance of the post office.
 6. However, using the Index of Deprivation methodology:
 - Approx. 1.8% of the population of Norwich are not within 1 mile (road distance) of their nearest post office.
 - Within the “deprived urban areas” in Norwich, all people are within 1 mile of the post office.
 7. Also, the minimum access criteria are national criteria, so even if parts of Norwich didn't fit the above criteria this wouldn't matter as long as the criteria were met nationally.
 8. Appendix – Branch Access Reports. The following data in these reports were checked for the 3 post offices in Norwich proposed for closure:
 - Population within a mile radius, and population within the age bands 0-15, 16-64 and 65+;
 - Percentage of households with a car or van;
 - Road distances to nearest alternative post offices.
 9. The data for the used by Post Office Ltd for the above matches with the information that we hold.

10. The only question from this part of the exercise is whether the population profile within a mile of a post office is really an accurate picture of the “catchment population” of a particular office. Populations for smaller, more focused areas are probably more meaningful, as typically within the city area there are about 5 other post offices within a mile radius of the PO proposed for closure.