
REPORT TO: COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE **AGENDA ITEM:** 6

DATE OF MEETING: 31st July 2006 **CATEGORY:**

REPORT FROM: DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE **OPEN**

MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT: John Porter (Ext 5780)

SUBJECT: Briefing note - Possible changes to the rural Post Office Network

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To make Members aware of possible changes to the rural post office network, and to provide Members with the opportunity to suggest a way forward on this issue Network.

2.0 Background

2.1 The government has to give notice to Post Office Ltd., of its future funding of the rural post office network by the end of September 2006. This funding is only in place to March 2008.

2.2 The Department of Work and Pensions have added further uncertainty to the viability of the post office network as a whole, by stating that it will no longer fund the recently introduced Post Office Card Account after 2010.

2.3 These issues stem from Postcomm's report entitled '*State of the Network: Recommendations for the future of the social post office network*' which was published in July 2006.

2.4 The aim of Postcomm's report was to provide stakeholders with an awareness of the role of the post office network and its future challenges; and to inform government decision-making, on the future of the of the post office network by making 27 recommendations.

2.5 These were:

- What is the role of the UK's post office network?
- How can post office services remain accessible?
- How can customers and communities inform government decision-making?
- How should change to the network be delivered?

- 2.6 One of the recommendations made in their report is that *'the government should engage local authority representatives, such as the Local Government Association, National Association of Local Councils, the SPARSE grouping of local authorities and regional development agencies in it's efforts to determine the future of the post office network'*
- 2.7 Other stakeholders, such as customer and community groups are now being asked to raise their concerns about the future of the post office network
- 2.8 Any announcements regarding proposed changes to the post office network have to be made in accordance with guidance set out in the *'Code of Practice on changes to the Post Office Network'* This means that post office stakeholders will have to respond to any major changes to the planned network within a six week consultation period for rural post offices.

3.0 Way Forward

- 3.7 A briefing note, which acts a discussion document for Members, is attached at Appendix A.
- 3.8 Members may wish to consider:
- a) Lobbying the Government, possibly via the local MP, regarding their future funding of the rural post office network
 - b) Making arrangements to consult with internal and external stakeholders
 - c) Reporting findings of the baseline position to a relevant Policy Committee or a meeting of the Council
 - d) Ways of supporting and developing services, by ourselves and partners for delivery by the rural post office network to improve their viability

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 None arising directly from this report

5.0 Background Papers

- 5.1 Postcomm's report *'State of the Network: Recommendations for the future of the social post office network'* July 2006.