

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee **Stratford on Avon East Joint Committee**

Date of Committee **15 July 2008**

Report Title **The Future of Post Offices in South Warwickshire**

Summary This report sets out the programme for managing the impact of the Post Office closure announcements on 24 June 2008 in South Warwickshire.

For further information please contact:

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?
No.

Background papers None

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:- Details to be specified

- Other Committees
- Local Member(s) N/A
- Other Elected Members
- Cabinet Member Councillor Saint
Councillor Timms
- Chief Executive Jim Graham, (WCC)
Paul Lankester, (SDC)
- Legal Jane Pollard, (WCC)
- Finance
- Other Strategic Directors David Carter (WCC), Paul Galland (WCC), Dave Nash (SDC)
- District Councils Stratford-on-Avon

DC.....

Health Authority

Police

Other Bodies/Individuals Alison John, Nick Robinson, Edwina Cordwell, Mandy Walker, Steve Patalong, Paul Williams, Ayub Khan, Louise Richards, Leigh Hunt, Eric Britton, Nick Gower-Johnson, Martin Gibbins, Alison Hodge, Warwickshire Association of Local Councils

FINAL DECISION YES

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

Further consideration by this Committee

To Council

To Cabinet ..WCC Cabinet and SDC Executive – formal response to proposals.....

To an O & S Committee

To an Area Committee

Further Consultation Locally organised Parish, and residents meetings.

Agenda No 6

Joint Committee - July 2008

The Future of Post Offices in South Warwickshire

Report of the Strategic Director, Performance & Development and Strategic Director

Recommendation

That the Joint Committee:

- a) Having heard any local representations, forward its views to the respective Cabinet/Executive to be taken into account when those bodies determine the response from their respective Councils
- b) Recommend that the outcome of public consultation is submitted to the respective Cabinet and Executives in July/early August.
- c) Makes any other comments which it considers appropriate.

1 Background

1.1 The government has instructed Post Office Ltd (POL) to close 2,500 of its branches, to be spread evenly over the country. There has been clear access criteria laid down by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), as follows:

- 99% of the UK population must be within 3 miles of a post office, with 90% within 1 mile
- 99% of the population within deprived areas must be within 1 mile of a post office
- 95% of the urban population must be within 1 mile of a post office
- 95% of the rural population must be within 3 miles of a post office

1.2 The criteria for deciding which post offices are to close are:

- The above access criteria
- The financial contribution (profit or loss) the office makes to Post Office Ltd
- The number of customers
- The ability of other nearby post offices to take on extra business
- Local factors – bus routes, ease of access etc.

1.3 Subpostmasters are compensated for the termination of their contract with 28 months remuneration. It is believed that many are finding this an attractive

option. Whether or not the subpostmaster wants to go is not taken into consideration – the idea is to plan a comprehensive network.

- 1.4 Experience elsewhere suggests that without access to the full Post Office database and the full details of their model, it is impossible to predict many of the closures that emerge from the process.

2 The South Warwickshire Timetable

- 2.1 The local Area plan will cover Birmingham and Coventry, together with Warwickshire. The timetable, which is well under way now, is as follows:

Postwatch informed of affected locations 15 weeks before the formal consultation document is published.

14 June approx	MPs for local constituencies informed of the detailed proposals
24 June	Formal consultation document outlining closure proposals and individual branch information published. Consultation starts.
15 – 25 July	Joint Committees
28 July	SDC – Executive
31 July	WCC - Cabinet
4 August	Consultation period closes
29 August approx	Final decisions announced
October 2008	Post Office closures start

- 2.2 The public consultation period lasts 6 weeks from 24 June and during this time Post Office Ltd. will consider representations from interested organisations and the public. Details on how to do this are contained in the consultation document. Post Office staff have been requested to attend public meetings. The whole process is overseen by Postwatch, an organisation with a statutory involvement in the process to ensure that the public's views are represented.

- 2.3 Warwickshire has 147 Post Offices currently. 9 of these are temporarily closed. There are 7 proposed closures within the District of Stratford-on-Avon. The proposed closures are Bridgetown, Stratford upon Avon and Broom. There are 5 outreach services intended to mitigate the impact of the closures at Brailes; Ilmington, Long Compton, Preston –on Stour and Wilmcote.

- 2.4 Once the current Network Change Programme has been implemented, the Post Office will no longer be obliged to find replacements for retiring sub post masters. The criteria in paragraph 1.1 will still apply.

3 Actions Undertaken in South Warwickshire to date

- 3.1 A joint letter (County/District/Borough) was sent to the PO Ltd in response to letters dated July 2007 and 19 October 2007 from Sue Huggins, Programme Director at the Network Change Programme Office.
- 3.2 Local Authority officers in the West Midlands have met at the Government Office for the West Midlands on two occasions (most recently 8 May 2008), to share experience and ideas. Business Link attended the last meeting and has pledged to offer business advice to any business affected by the closure programme
- 3.3 Warwickshire County Council has supported an Officer from the Warwickshire Rural Community Council, WRCC, with experience in supporting rural Post Offices, to help identify potential problem areas, particularly with village shops that may become vulnerable if they lose their post office income. Some initial analysis has been carried out with the help of the Observatory.
- 3.4 A meeting took place with Post Office Ltd on 2 May 2008. This was attended by colleagues from District and Borough Councils.
- 3.5 A meeting took place with Postwatch on 13 June 2008. This was attended by colleagues from District and Borough Councils.
- 3.6 A meeting also took place on 13 June 2008 with a Post Office representative to find out about new services that Post Office will be promoting to help improve income for surviving post offices around the UK. These services are being piloted and may provide more effective ways to communicate and consult with local communities.
- 3.7 A number of dates have also been given to Post Office Ltd so that the public consultation can be co-ordinated and facilitated around the County.
- 3.8 Olwen Dutton from West Midlands Local Government Association met with Post Office Ltd representatives on 17 June.

4 The Way Forward for Stratford District

- 4.1 There is an opportunity for everyone to be involved in the public consultation process and expressing their views, by writing to Mark Partington, Network Development Manager C/O National Consultation Team, FREEPOST CONSULTATION TEAM. There is also a telephone helpline: 08457 22 33 44, and an e mail. Address consultation@postoffice.co.uk. All representations should be received by 4 August 2008.

- 4.2 Senior Officers, Members from District, Borough, Town, Parish and County Councils attended an evening forum at Shire Hall on 9 July. Post Office Ltd and Postwatch gave a full briefing to the meeting.
- 4.2 Post Office Ltd was invited to attend the full Council meeting of the District Council on 14 July, to ensure all Members received a briefing and had the opportunity to discuss the proposals.
- 4.3 These Joint Committees, held between 15 and 25 July 2008 will be the mechanism used for public consultation, facilitated by the County and District in South Warwickshire. Ward Members, Parish Councils, Sub-Postmasters and residents are encouraged to engage further at local level and jointly drive any challenges to the closures in particular communities.
- 4.4 Stratford-on-Avon District Council Executive will provide a formal response to the closures announced for the District, on 28 July. This will form part of a co-ordinated response by the County Council on behalf of all councils in Warwickshire.
- 4.3 On 22 July, Warwickshire County Councils Economic Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee will consider a report on the impact of closures and results of public consultation and make recommendations to its Cabinet on 31 July 2008.
- 4.4 County Council officers have produced a map showing the locations identified for closure so that the impact on communities can be discussed. Public Relations Officers from District, Borough and County Councils have co-ordinated public relations following the announcement.
- 4.6 Business Link, supported by WRCC as appropriate, have been asked to visit and provide a business diagnostic for all post offices affected by the announcements, particularly where the retail business may be compromised by closure.
- 4.7 The Warwickshire Observatory will provide information profiling for communities affected by closures and relate this to available local authority services. This may provide opportunities for continuing provision in other ways, e.g. One Stop Shop or outreach.
- 4.8 Where the closure may have a major impact or be unacceptable to the affected community, a solid economic, social and environmental case would be presented to Post Office Limited within the consultation period opposing closure. The County Council would facilitate this process with the support of the Districts. It is anticipated that members, including Parish and Town Councils, will play a key role in this process.

5 Recommendations

That the Joint Committee:

- a) Having heard any local representations, forward its views to the respective Cabinet/Executive to be taken into account when those bodies determine the response from their respective Councils
- b) Recommend that the outcome of public consultation is submitted to the respective Cabinet and Executives in July/early August.
- c) Makes any other comments which it considers appropriate.

DAVID CARTER
Strategic Director,
Performance & Development

DAVE NASH
Strategic Director (SDC)

Shire Hall
Warwick
4 July 2008