

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL
Report by Chief Executive
Council Meeting: 28th November, 2007

Subject: The Post Office Network Change Programme

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This report informs Members of the proposed programme of post office closures in West Dunbartonshire, and sets out the likely impact in each area.

2. Background

- 2.1** The Government has agreed a programme of 12,500 closures of post offices throughout the U.K., approximately 17.5% of the existing number. In Scotland this means that almost 300 Post Offices are expected to close.
- 2.2** Post Office Ltd has announced in its Argyll and Bute, Greater Glasgow and Central Scotland Area Plan, of which West Dunbartonshire is part, that it proposes to close 44 branches (5 in West Dunbartonshire) and to replace 3 others with outreach services.
- 2.3** The Government expects Post Office Ltd., to implement these network changes within the next 18 months, with the first closures expected in January 2008.
- 2.4** On 24th October, 2007 the Post office announced that it proposes to close five post offices in West Dunbartonshire. These are:
- Bowling, Dumbarton Road.
 - Brucehill, Brucehill Road, Dumbarton
 - Newton, Glasgow road, Dumbarton
 - Levenvale, Argyll Street, Alexandria
 - Radnor Park, Kilbowie Road, Clydebank
- 2.5** At the same time as announcing these closures the Post Office launched its formal consultation, which will run for six weeks from 23rd October, 2007 until the 3rd of December, 2007.
- 2.6** There is to be no public consultation on the need to close post offices, as this has already been agreed by the Government. Instead the consultation process will be seeking views on the most effective way in which the Government's policy can be implemented.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The closure process is prescribed by Government by a set of minimum access criteria, and the Post Office can only propose changes to the network within these parameters. The criteria applied are as follows:

Access Criteria

- Nationally 99% of the population to be within 3 miles and 90% to be within 1 mile of a post office
- In deprived urban areas, 99% of the population to be within 1 mile of a post office
- In urban areas 95% of the population to be within 1 mile of a post office

Other Criteria

- Regeneration and development plans for this area
- Details of any proposed new settlements
- Any major road schemes likely to have a material impact on accessibility between communities
- Any significant public transport changes including enhancements, new provisions and likely withdrawal of key services
- Information on practical issues involved in accessing alternative branches e.g. topography, barriers to access.
- Details of any negative economic impacts in terms of associated business, services, and especially one person enterprises.

- 3.2** Currently, within West Dunbartonshire, 100% of the population live within 3 miles and around 99% within 1 mile of a Post Office. In a number of locations there are up to 3-4 Post Offices within a 1 mile radius.
- 3.3** In two instances in West Dunbartonshire the Post Office has not met the minimum access criteria for post offices proposed for closure. These are the Post Offices in Brucehill, Dumbarton, and Radnor Park in Clydebank.
- 3.4** At the meeting of the full Council on the 26th September, 2007 the Council agreed to oppose the closure of any post office within West Dunbartonshire, to campaign in support of this and seek the support of the local MP, John McFall.
- 3.5** In the light of this decision the Council now requires a case to be made to the Post Office to retain all five Post Offices earmarked for closure. The case for each post office is set out below.
- 3.6** The proposed closure of the branch at Brucehill, Dumbarton can be opposed on the basis that it does not fulfil the minimum access criteria laid down by the Government and agreed by the Post Office in relation to levels of deprivation.
- Closing this branch leaves a number of households' beyond 1 mile of the nearest branch and also does not take account of the high levels of deprivation within Brucehill, Castlehill and Westcliff, which is confirmed through the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).
 - Should this Post Office branch close over 2,000 people will be more than 1 mile from the nearest post office with the distance from the western most part of Westcliff and Castlehill to the town Centre being almost 2 miles, with a large part of the journey back from the town centre uphill.
 - The communities of Brucehill, Westcliff and Castlehill are amongst the poorest in Scotland. There are approximately 1500 people living in the 5% most deprived communities in Scotland with a further 1500 people living in the 15% most

deprived communities. Car ownership in this area is low with 45% of households with no access to a car or van.

- Around 70% of the transactions taken by this Post Office relate to the administration of state benefits, confirming the levels of deprivation this area possesses.

3.7 Similarly, the proposal to close the branch Post Office at Radnor Park, Clydebank can be contested on the grounds that it does not fulfil the minimum access criteria in relation to capacity and in relation to the vulnerability of the population.

- The proposed closure of the branch at Radnor Park, which in conjunction with the closure due to fire of the branch at Parkhall may result in the remaining post offices having insufficient capacity to meet customer needs. Further, the proposed closure does not also take account the topography of the area or the very high levels of elderly and very elderly people who live in this area.
- There are 6,312 pensioners living in Parkhall and Radnor Park, which is 3% higher than the Scottish average figure for an area of this size. Of these, 1,461 are aged 80+ which is again slightly higher than the Scottish norm. Any reduction in post office service should be opposed by the Council as this is likely to have a much greater impact on this section of the population who rely far more heavily on Post Office services than other sections of the population.
- Incidences of disability increase with age, and of this age group there are 688 people in receipt incapacity benefit or severe disability allowance. Therefore older populations need more, rather than less, locally provided services.
- From the farthest point of Parkhall to Dalmuir Post Office is 1.25 miles and from the farthest point of Parkhall to Clydebank Shopping Centre is 1.8 miles. However, this measures a direct route and therefore the actual distance will be substantially greater.
- The topography of the area comprises several steep hills to access either Dalmuir Post Office or the main Post Office at Sylvania Way. Even fit elderly people trying to negotiate this topography would find it a test, being both difficult in winter conditions on the way down and too physically challenging a hill on the way back.
- The combined population of Parkhall and Radnor Park is 30,118, of which 29% are multiply deprived as described in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation's 15% most deprived communities in Scotland. Car ownership is low, with 50.5% of the population in this area do with no access to a car or van. Given the very high levels of elderly and vulnerable people it is vital that there is no further loss of service to this community.

3.8 The proposed closure of the Post Office in Levensale can be opposed on the grounds that it too services a very large deprived community.

- There are 6 datazones in the 15% most deprived in Scotland in this area, which accounts for 4,605 people. One datazone is in the 2% most deprived communities in Scotland, and another is in the 4% most deprived communities in Scotland, with the remaining four ranked between the 10% and 15% most deprived communities in Scotland. It is very likely that closing this Post Office will have a considerable impact on a significantly deprived community.

- It should be noted however that, if this Post Office is retained it may threaten the viability of the post office in Tulliechewan, which is situated a short distance from this location.

3.9 The proposed closure of the Post Office at Newton can be opposed on the grounds that substantial regeneration at Dumbarton waterfront is underway.

- Almost 1,000 new houses are planned or under construction in this area. Therefore the regeneration initiatives for Dumbarton Harbour, Waterfront and Dumbarton East provide a compelling argument for the retention of this Post Office.

- However, caution is required in this instance, as keeping the post office service at Newton may pose a threat to the Post Office in Silverton.

3.10 The proposed closure of the Post Office in Bowling can be opposed on the basis that it also poses a threat to the Council's regeneration programme in that area.

- The West Dunbartonshire Local Plan sets out the regeneration priorities for the area. In addition to the three town centres and related waterfront areas, the waterfront at Bowling is identified as a regeneration priority. It is likely that in the foreseeable future there will be considerable investment in this area therefore the Council should aim to ensure that Bowling is within 1 mile of a Post Office.
- Redevelopment opportunities at Bowling Basin, Bowling Harbour and the former Esso Terminal, which form part of the Strathleven Corridor, have been recognised by the Council and its partners. The retention of the Post Office at Bowling would ensure that these substantial regeneration opportunities have access to a Post Office.
- It is also necessary to bear in mind that supporting this Post Office poses a threat to the Post Office in Old Kilpatrick.

3.11 While it is recognised that Council has made the commitment to opposing the closure of all five post offices, it is suggested that the response to the consultation should provide some indication of priority in relation to the scale of the impact on the local communities involved. Appendix 1 provides a suggested response, based on the arguments set out in paragraph 3.6 – 3.10.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 There are no personnel issues.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The council receives around £300,000 in Council Tax transactions per month through the existing Post Office network.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1 Last year 4 million fewer customers visited a post office branch each week compared to 2 years previously, and the network's losses increased to almost £4 million per week. These losses are currently being met by Government subsidy. The Post Office asserts that there is a wide spread, if reluctant, consensus that the current network of over 14,000 post offices is unsustainable in its present form. While the government remains committed to maintaining a national post office network, it believes that a new policy and financial framework is necessary to put this network on a stable footing. This will involve some reduction in the size of the network.

Without direction from the Council, Post Office Ltd., have in the past imposed closures across West Dunbartonshire over which the Council has had no control. This process will continue with similar outcomes unless the Council provides strategic direction.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 The Council is asked to consider the content of this report, the suggested response to Post Office Ltd in Appendix 1, and agree its response to the Post Office consultation.

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Date: 22 November 2007

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Appendix: Proposed response to Post Office Ltd.

Background Papers: The Post Office Network Change Programme
Report to Council – 26th September 2007

Wards Affected: All Wards

Appendix 1

Post Office Ltd has asked West Dunbartonshire Council to respond to its proposals to close five post offices before the 3rd December, 2007. The Council has agreed that it cannot support any reduction in postal services within West Dunbartonshire and acknowledges that post offices have an important social and economic role in the communities that they serve. However, while the Council remains committed to maintaining the network it also recognises that the Post Office Network Change Programme needs to be carefully managed in order to ensure that communities with the greatest social needs do not lose access to post office services. Therefore the following table lists the reasons and the order of priority that the Council would want to put to the Post Office in response to its closure proposals.

Priority	Name of Post Office Branch	Reason to retain
1.	Brucehill	Does not fulfil minimum access criteria laid down by Government, in relation to levels of deprivation. Would leave more than 2000 people beyond 1 mile of distance of alternative post office service. Retaining service would not pose threat to any remaining post office.
2.	Radnor Park	Does not fulfil minimum access criteria laid down by Government, in relation to vulnerability of population and capacity of alternative post office after the closure of the post office in Parkhall due to fire. Geography of area very hilly and difficult to negotiate on foot. Retaining service would not pose threat to any remaining post office.
3.	Bowling	Closing this post office would be contrary to the regeneration priorities of the Council and its partners at Bowling Basin, Bowling Harbour and the former Esso Terminal.
4.	Levenvale	Closing this post office would be a reduction in service to a very large deprived community. This design of this post office also allows access to wheelchairs and motobility scooters.
5.	Newton	Closing this post office would be contrary to the Council's priorities for the future regeneration of Dumbarton Harbour and Dumbarton Waterfront.