

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	Scrutiny and Overview Committee	15 February 2007
AUTHOR/S:	Chief Executive / Senior Democratic Services Officer	

UPDATE FROM POST OFFICE SUB-GROUP

Purpose

1. To update the Committee on the progress made by the sub-group on co-ordinating the Committee's response to the Government's consultation process on the future funding, size and structure of the rural post office network.

Background

2. The Committee heard a presentation from Postwatch on this issue on 18 January 2007 and set up a sub-group of Councillors R Hall, Mrs EM Heazell, AG Orgee and Mrs HM Smith to respond to the threat posed to the District's post offices by the closure programme.
3. The sub-group met directly after January's the Committee and instructed the Senior Democratic Services Officer to ascertain the distance from each post office by road to complement January's report, which detailed the distance "as the crow flies".

Considerations: Government's Access Criteria

4. The Department of Trade & Industry (DTI) proposed the following access criteria to inform the closure programme:
 - Nationally, 99% within 3 miles of a post office and 90% of the population to be within 1 mile.
 - In rural areas, 95% of the total rural population within 3 miles.
 - In remote areas, 95% of the population in postcode districts within 6 miles.
5. January's Committee meeting asserted that the distance between each post office "as the crow flies" was less meaningful than the distance by roads, as this would be the way in which post offices would be accessed by our residents. I contacted the DTI on this matter and got the following response:
"The national consultation outlines the broad framework based on measuring the percentage of population within the radius of each post office. However, in implementing the proposals, Post Office Ltd would take into account local factors affecting ease of access, such as rivers, mountains, valleys and sea crossings".
6. I therefore suggest that the Committee's response to the consultation process includes a reference to the importance of calculating the distance by road not radius and emphasising the difference between the two for a rural district.

Consultations

7. All elected members have been invited to comment on the postal services in their villages. In particular Members were invited to answer:
 - Is your post office just a post office, or is it part of a shop?
 - Is your post office the only shop in the village?
 - Does your post office have car parking facilities?

- If your post office was to close, what bus services and other transport facilities(e.g. pavements, footpaths, cycleways etc.) are available?
8. The responses received from Members have been incorporated in the table in appendix a. This table also details the difference between using a radius and the most accessible route. The figures on distance expressed “as the crow flies” were taken from the post office website, while the distance via roads were obtained from www.multimap.co.uk

Implications

9.	Financial	The proposed post office reorganisation has no direct risk implications for the Council
	Legal	
	Staffing	
	Risk Management	
	Equal Opportunities	

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

10.	Affordable Homes	None
	Customer Service	None as it is not the Council's service
	Northstowe and other growth areas	None
	Quality, Accessible Services	None, as it is not the Council's service
	Village Life	Post offices play an important social and economic role in village life
	Sustainability	The provision of services locally is more sustainable than forcing residents to travel outside their villages.
	Partnership	The Council is keen to work in partnership to ensure that its residents continue to have access to post office services.

Recommendations

11. The Committee are invited to note the progress made on this issue and make any final recommendations on what should be included in the response to the Government's consultation, before the deadline of 8 March 2007.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

The Post Office Network – a consultation document from the DTI. This document is accessible on the DTI website: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/files/file36025.pdf>

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