

In our meeting with Mr. Fitzpatrick, the minister responsible for Post Office business, and in letters to him and his successor (Mr. McFadden), we put forward the idea that, rather than close or diminish post offices, the existing infrastructure and staff should be used to offer a much more comprehensive range of services. This would be one way of tackling the lack of facilities for people in rural and poor inner city areas where basic facilities just don't exist. Below is the text sent on to them. (Also circulated to others who might be interested including Essex County Council who are looking at ways of buying up "at risk" post offices, to keep them open in rural areas.)

People in this area are appalled at the prospect of losing their post office service. Rather than diminish rural facilities, they are asking for the Post Office management to consider a major expansion of services which would bring a much wider range of communications, financial and official and administrative facilities within easy reach.

Our suggestion is that the existing network of rural post offices could become the base for providing the financial and business equivalent of the g.p. Primary Care Service.

The advantages would include:

- Making good use of existing premises and competent staff in appropriate locations.
- Providing income generating work which wd help to off-set the present level of post office losses.
- Making it easy for local people to access a wide range of financial, business, administrative, benefits etc services which would reduce their need to travel. (ideas to indicate range of services given below.)
- Taking pressure off over-stretched offices in towns/cities by downloading "primary" functions to localised offices who would be paid a reasonable fee for their services.
- Providing a reliable source of information on a range of official business which is often difficult for people to access (eg. where or how to apply for benefits etc.)
- Also providing a referral system up the line for people who need more detailed advice/services.

Ideas for services which could be provided on a local basis. (These ideas are in addition to the very welcome suggestions put forward in the Post Office consultation document. They are "off the top of the head" of local people and more ideas are coming in all the time.)

- Payment of court fines (Post offices already have safes and trusted staff to handle money. The suggestion is that fines would be paid more regularly if its made easy for the payers.)
- Payment of parental contributions (as above.)
- Provision of application forms and advice on filling in for Benefits claims, disability allowances etc.
- Provision of Attendance allowance forms/assistance with completion.
- Advice/assistance with applying for home care, meals on wheels, etc.
- Application for/renewal of Disabled Parking Permits
- Council Tax payments
- Provision of bus passes, rail passes.
- Secure drop off point for doctor's prescriptions and/or prescribed medication.
- Basic information and help with tax returns.
- Passport application/renewal service (eg. checking documents and arranging secure postage.)
- Driving licence/driving test applications at all post offices.
- Car registration documents (to be extended to all Post Offices)
- Signing On (eg. saving necessity to travel to Job Centre.)
- Registration of births, deaths, marriages.
- VAT documents provision/basic advice.
- Receipt of rent on behalf of private, local authority or housing association landlords.
- Housing application
- Gun licence application/renewal
- tractor and other farm-related licences.
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