



Post Office News - June 2018

The lasting impact of Post Office transformation - a Welsh view

Since 2012, 484 post offices in Wales have been modernised or moved into new premises. These changes have been part of the Network Transformation Programme, designed to help maintain the sustainability of post office network and retain or improve access for vulnerable consumers.

[Research](#) from Citizens Advice shows accessibility concerns in over 1 in 5 of the 122 post offices we mystery shopped in Wales. We found restricted access in 17% of locations, with cases of retail stock and fixed displays restricting the movement around the premises. Of the 6 post offices that should have provided disabled access parking, 3 did not have dedicated disabled bays in place. We also found level access concerns in 6% of locations which included steps, uneven thresholds or no ramps available.

Citizens Advice presented these accessibility concerns to Post Office Limited (POL) and as a result, they have committed to improving 100% of the post office locations in question. This includes ensuring disabled parking bays are put in place. Obstacles causing restricted access have already been removed in 20 branches and POL is working with operators on the lack of level access in 7 branches.

Post Office outreach services - what's most important to consumers?

Over 1 in 10 ([12%](#)) of post offices are now run as outreach services. Typically these are part-time services including mobile vans and post offices hosted in other premises such as village halls.

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) has [looked](#) at the factors consumers consider to be most important in a Post Office outreach service. These include:

- reliability - people expect consistent opening days and times

- location - hosted services should be central and accessible by public transport, and without being exposed to busy traffic
- accessibility - mobile services must cater for disabled people
- customer service - staff should be knowledgeable and helpful. Staff training may be particularly important where retail or other staff offer Post Office services
- privacy - privacy should be available where needed, although this may be restricted due to the nature of the premises

CAS also finds low levels of both awareness and use of Post Office outreach, amongst people living in areas served by these services. Research participants raised issues around the promotion of opening hours, and concerns about communications around contingency arrangements if something goes wrong and service provision is affected.

CAS will use these findings to draft an evaluation framework for Post Office outreach services.

Citizens Advice reports on trends in the postal services market

A new [report](#) from Citizens Advice brings together our recent work, highlighting our current priorities and recommendations for improvements in the postal services market.

The postal sector has been rapidly changing since the growth of e-commerce with many more consumers buying online. This is happening at the same time as pressure is being placed on Royal Mail by the continuing decline of letter volumes.

Against this backdrop Citizens Advice is working to ensure that consumers have accurate and correct information about delivery services, including their rights to redress. In the parcels sector, we are concerned that the pressure of increasing delivery numbers may lead to a reduction in service quality. We are also focussed on ensuring the needs of vulnerable, especially disabled, consumers are met.

Royal Mail revenue grows, but First Class mail target missed

Royal Mail Group [reports](#) end of year revenue of over £10bn, an increase of 2%. Royal Mail says this is driven by parcel growth - parcel revenues are up by 4% and parcel volumes by 5%.

The latest research for Royal Mail [shows](#) 26% of UK consumers are weekly online shoppers, and 68% shop online at least once a month. Consumers

are spending more than last year, with the average consumer spending £220 in online shopping over a 3 month period, compared with £205 this time last year.

In contrast Royal Mail's addressed letter volumes declined by 5% in 2017/18. The company is warning that the new European data privacy law (GDPR) may reduce marketing mail, causing a higher rate in the fall in letter volumes.

Royal Mail has missed its annual regulatory target for First Class mail, delivering 91.6% the next working day, against a target of 93%. Royal Mail says deliveries were significantly impacted by 'a very challenging industrial relations environment, some very severe weather... and significantly reduced staffing levels caused by the flu outbreak'.

RBS branch closures highlight importance of Post Office banking

The Royal Bank of Scotland is set to close 162 branches in England and Wales, raising fresh concerns that many rural communities will be left without access to a bank branch.

The bank is also closing 62 branches across Scotland, and a Scottish Affairs Committee inquiry concludes that this closure programme will be a 'devastating blow' to the affected communities. The committee recognises the increasing importance of the Post Office as a provider of banking services. Its report states it is 'essential that the banks and Post Office communicate with each other about their closure decisions, and work together to ensure all communities have a location where it is possible to access face-to-face banking services'.

In response to numerous parliamentary questions about the RBS closures, the government continues to stress the Post Office and UK Finance's commitment to raise awareness of banking services available at the Post Office.

Post developments around the world

- **Ireland** - Social welfare payments make up 40% of all post office business and Irish postmasters are [demanding](#) a long-term commitment that payments will continue to be transacted through the network. Under a €50 investment plan, post offices have been promised a range of new government, financial and parcel services.
- **Switzerland** - Swiss Post is [increasing](#) its number of physical access points to 4,200. It is recommending that one access point is guaranteed for every 15,000 inhabitants and stresses the importance of ensuring its services remain accessible for people who are digitally excluded.
- **Norway** - Posten Norge now offers at-home parcel [collection](#). For a fee customers can go online, pay for postage and arrange for next-day collection of parcels. The service is expected to be especially attractive for e-commerce returns, but may lead to reduced footfall for post offices.
- **United States** - A [bill](#) has been introduced to create a retail bank at all 31,000 US post offices. It would offer low-cost basic financial services, and is designed to provide an accessible alternative to payday loans.

More on Citizens Advice post policy work

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