

3. Postcode Address File

An address is a collection of information to identify the location of a building, flat or plot of land. Addresses get used for different purposes, including:

- identifying properties for delivering mail¹
- to find out if an area is at risk of flood²
- the price an insurer offers car insurance at³.

The Postcode Address File is the UK's central database of addresses.

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¹ <https://www.royalmail.com/find-a-postcode>

² [Check the long term flood risk for an area in England](#)

³ [Comparethemarket: The cheapest postcodes for car insurance](#)

3.1 Introducing the Postcode Address File and code of practice

The Postcode Address File (PAF) is a list of the 30 million delivery points in the UK - over 1.8 million postcodes. Information fields about each postcode help accurate delivery of mail, such as property numbers or street names. Royal Mail own and maintain PAF - it's one of their responsibilities under the Postal Services Act. It reflects the delivery points that are 'live' for receiving mail.

There are around 37,000 end-users of PAF. The data is used by:

- Royal Mail to sort, sequence and deliver mail
- other postal operators to sort mail when they use Royal Mail access and bulk products
- businesses for products like database management, address capture, insurance, mapping and marketing

PAF has details of around 1.4 million business names and details of around 200,000 vacant properties. It doesn't include:

- details of every individual property (for example, a building where several flats share a letterbox is listed as a single delivery point)
- names of individuals living at a particular address
- addresses for places such as parks.

Accessing accurate address and postcode information in PAF helps organisations:

- provide a more efficient and professional service to customers
- convert more online sales and reduce the risk of fraud
- optimise planning and resource allocation
- save time and money

The PAF Code of Practice explains how and why addresses might change and how those changes will be introduced.

3.2 Addresses and postcodes

Every house and business in the UK has a postal address from Royal Mail. Postcodes are a sorting and routing instruction for Royal Mail that allow quick, accurate delivery. A postcode isn't always a geographically accurate description for a property location - Royal Mail moves post around using their network of sorting and delivery offices. A postal address might include the name of a town several miles away from a property, because that's where the post gets processed. For example, DN9 1EP:

- the nearest town is Scunthorpe - 12 miles away
- the post town is Doncaster - 16 miles away.

3.2.1 Postal addresses

A postal address is a combination of different pieces of data:

Data	Postally required	Example
Name of addressee (title, initials, surname)	Not if building name or number present	Mr A Smith
Company/organisation		Acme Plc
Building name	Not if building number present	Acme House
House number of building and name of street or road	Yes	3 High Street
Additional locality/townland * Information	Where similar road names exist within a post town area or there is another operational requirement	Hedle End
Post town (capital letters)	Yes	SOUTHAMPTON
County	No	Hampshire
Postcode (capital letters)	Yes	SO31 4NG

*A townland is a small geographical area of land used in Ireland

3.2.2 Postcodes

A postcode is a combination of letters and numbers that define 4 different levels of a geographic unit. Each postcode consists of 2 parts, called the Outward Code and the Inward Code. A single space separates the first part from the second.

Outward Code		Inward Code sorts mail INTO area delivery office	
EC	1A	4	HD
Allows mail to be sorted to the correct area for delivery	Identifies correct district for delivery	Identifies sector in postal district	Identifies 1 or more properties in the sector

Royal Mail allocates postcodes according to the operational needs of their network. They sometimes change to help deliver mail quickly and efficiently. Reasons they might change a postcode include:

- a new delivery office gets built
- Royal Mail runs out of postcodes to allocate to new homes and businesses in a developing area
- a local council prompts a change by renumbering buildings or renaming roads.

3.3 Postcode Address File change consultation process

Consumers and businesses sometimes want to change their postal address. Delivery people might have problems finding a property or people might think their address should reflect a location they perceive to be more desirable.

The Postcode Address File explains why and how postal addresses might change and how the changed addresses will be introduced. Changes can be made for 1 of 2 reasons:

1. to maintain or improve the service offered by Royal Mail Limited
2. to reflect customer demand

Royal Mail's priority is to deliver mail efficiently to customers. They will consider making changes that don't impact efficiency. But they won't make changes that could lead to a deterioration in the service they provide.

A request to change an address must come:

- from the person or people who live in the area affected by the change
- directly or via the local authority or parish council.

If the proposed change affects more than 1 address, the request must include:

- clear information about the boundary of the area affected
- evidence to show support for the change

Royal Mail must follow the PAF change consultation process for changes to post towns and postcodes.

Address data	Consultation required
Addressee name	No
Company / organisation	No
Building name or number	No
Street or road name	No
Locality information	No
Post town	Yes
County	No
Postcode	Yes

Addressee name

Only forms part of a postal address if there is no other way of identifying the correct delivery point. If the addressee name changes, Royal Mail will amend the postal address to reflect this.

Company/organisation

Royal Mail will change their records to reflect the name of the company/organisation that occupies the premises.

Building name or number

Naming and numbering of thoroughfares is the responsibility of local authorities. The postal address reflects the details provided by the local authority. It's easier to find a property by number rather than by name. So if the local authority numbers a house and the occupant names it, Royal Mail will only include the number in the address.

Occupants who want to change the name of a house without a number need to contact the local authority first. Royal Mail will consider if the new name might cause confusion or offence before they make a change.

Street or road name

Local authorities are responsible for naming roads. The postal address reflects the details provided by the local authority. Where a local authority makes a change, Royal Mail must alter the address held on PAF. Royal Mail will write to affected addresses to let them know.

Sometimes, both the name of the road where a property is, and the road leading to it, are both present in a postal address. If the road where the property is appears on street plans of the area, the name of the road leading to it might get removed from the postal address. This is subject to the person asking for the change providing:

- written evidence that all affected addresses are either in favour of the change or don't oppose it, and
- support for the change from the local authority or parish/district council and local chamber of commerce

Locality information

Royal Mail only makes changes that don't affect its quality of service or efficiency. Locality information might get added or deleted from a postal address subject to:

- support for the change from the local authority or parish/district council and local chamber of commerce
- an acceptable and clearly defined set of geographical boundary data
- no significant objection raised by those affected by the proposed change address

The person asking for the change must provide evidence of the geographical boundary and support for the change. Royal Mail will write to all affected addresses to:

- tell them what the proposal will add or delete
- give them an opportunity to register any objection.

If 20% or more of people affected by the change object, Royal Mail will poll all addresses affected. They'll implement the change if there's a 50% or more response rate in favour of the change. Their aim is to put the change in place within 2 months of starting the poll. Royal Mail shares feedback from any polls with Ofcom.

Post town

A post town is usually the main town in an area and post towns are how Royal Mail moves post around their network. Royal Mail only makes changes to post towns for operational reasons.

County

The county doesn't form part of any postal address so changes to it aren't covered by the PAF Code of Practice.

Postcode

Postcodes are the core of Royal Mail's distribution network. Changes to postcodes could compromise the service they provide, so changes only take place if:

- exceptional changes mean a change to the last 2 letters of an individual postcode is needed
- they choose to recode an area for operational reasons.

The person asking to change an individual postcode must provide supporting evidence to show that everyone affected by the change supports it. But if the

request might have a detrimental impact on Royal Mail operations, they're likely to refuse it.

Royal Mail follow their change consultation process if they carry out any recoding.

Size of change	PAF change consultation process
<p>Small change Affects more than 1 postcode but less than 200 addresses</p>	<p>Consult with local authority, parish/district council and local chamber of commerce</p> <p>Write to all companies at addresses affected by the change to tell them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the approximate date of implementation of proposed change • that all affected addresses will have a transitional period of 12 months when their old postal address will continue to be valid alongside the new address <p>Write to all other affected postal addresses inviting them to share their views on the change.</p> <p>One full month is allowed for consultation and comment.</p> <p>Write to all affected addresses once the changes are introduced to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • details of their new address • a summary of the feedback received and reasons for implementing the change. <p>Display a change decision notice in post offices in the affected area, if requested by the local authority, parish/district council and local chamber of commerce.</p>
<p>Large change Affects more than 200 addresses</p>	<p>The same process followed for a small change, plus:</p> <p>Consult with the Member(s) of Parliament concerned (and member of the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly Member for Wales or Northern Ireland where applicable).</p> <p>Minimum of 3 months for consultation and comment before making a decision.</p> <p>All domestic customers are provided with complimentary address labels.</p> <p>Write to everyone consulted with to let them know the decision.</p>

3.4 Maintaining the Postcode Address File

PAF drives most of the mechanised process for sorting mail into delivery walk order. This means it's integral to both delivery and Royal Mail's modernisation programme. And it impacts the nature and quality of PAF - Royal Mail has an incentive to maintain PAF accuracy.

Royal Mail's Address Maintenance team manages PAF. Royal Mail Operations provide most of the updates. Postmen and women confirm delivery points are live as they carry out their delivery walk. These updates are then collated by the delivery office and passed to the Address Maintenance Unit. There are an estimated 2000 updates to PAF each day.

Information and advice for address enquiries and postcode changes is available from the Address Maintenance Enquiry Line on 0345 601 1110.

Other PAF updates include:

- physical address changes - for example, new builds, alterations or demolitions
- virtual address changes - for example, recoding existing addresses, normally where the existing postcode has been exhausted.