

8. Post Offices

'Post office means any premises or vehicle in the United Kingdom from which postal services, or services provided under arrangements with a government department, are provided directly to the public' (Postal Services Act 2011, s15(1))

'The post office network is one of the largest remaining networks of physical infrastructure that can deliver face to face services to local communities' (Citizens Advice, September 2020)

8.1 Post office branches

8.2 Principles of Community Engagement

8.3 Post office products and services

8.4 Complaints about post offices

8.1 Post office branches

Different types of branches make up the post office network.

Main post offices

- branches situated in retail outlets - for example, supermarkets or convenience stores
- separate, dedicated Post Office counter
- usually offers the full range of Post Office services during core opening hours
- branches can offer extended opening hours - retail staff at retail counters offer a reduced range of services

Local post offices

- smaller post offices within retail premises like newsagents or petrol stations
- a combined Post Office-retail counter
- retail staff offer post office and retail services
- offer a reduced range of Post Office services for all the hours the retail premise is open

Outreach post offices

- provided by a subpostmaster from a nearby permanent post office
- provides services at fixed times - usually a few hours a week
- often in a village hall or from a mobile van

The mix of post office branch types in December 2020 was:

Branch type (Great Britain)	Number	Proportion of network
Directly managed branch	113	1%
Local	3905	36%
Main	3263	30%
Outreach	1613	15%
Traditional	2078	19%
Total	10972	100%

Source: Post policy team

Community post offices

- generally the 'last shop in the village' at least 0.5 miles from the nearest alternative retailer
- branch operators get a fixed rate of pay
- around half these branches operate as outreach branches and half as traditional branches

Community branch type (Great Britain)	Number
Outreach	1528
Traditional	1414
Total	2942

Source: Post policy team

8.2 Principles of Community Engagement

It's important customers are aware of changes to their local post offices and understand how it might affect them. People have the opportunity to give feedback on some post office changes. This can help Post Office Ltd improve their plans to better meet customers' needs. The [Principles of Community Engagement](#) sets out 3 ways Post Office Ltd must communicate and consult with customers and local representatives:

- notify
- engage
- consult.

8.2.1 Notify

Telling customers about changes around:

- opening hours
- temporary closure or service interruption
- re-opening of a temporarily closed branch in the same site
- opening a new branch unrelated to a previous closure
- location used by a mobile post office within a community

Post Office Ltd will usually display a poster in the branch. They will give customers 4 weeks notice about the change. Or as much as notice as possible if 4 weeks' notice isn't practical. A temporary closure notice includes details of other local branches and post office customer service.

8.2.2 Engage

Asking for feedback about a decision made to:

- reopen a branch that's been temporarily closed for 3 months in a new location
- change a directly managed branch to a franchised branch

Whilst Post Office Ltd has already decided to make the change, they ask customers and local representatives for feedback about specific aspects of the change. For example, access arrangements and internal layout.

A poster in the branch will give customers 4 weeks notice about the change. Or as much as notice as possible if 4 weeks' notice isn't practical. Post Office Ltd tells locally elected representatives, consumer advocacy bodies and selected charities about changes to services or branch access arrangements. Post Office Ltd encourages these organisations to share information with others in the community.

The outcome of the engagement gets published online and in branch. It responds to the key issues raised and explains any changes made to original plans.

8.2.3 Consult

Asking for feedback before a decision is made about a permanent:

- closure of a branch
- relocation of a branch - includes changing a directly managed branch to a franchised branch at a new location.

A 6 week public consultation tells people about the proposed change. It's published online and shared with locally elected representatives, consumer advocacy bodies and selected charities. Post Office Ltd encourages these organisations to share information with others in the community. A press release gets issued to local media if a branch is being relocated.

The consultation:

- asks specific questions about access to post office services
- gives information about changes to post office services and access arrangements
- says when the change will take place - if Post Office Ltd decide to go ahead with it.

They aim to make a decision within 4 weeks of the consultation ending. Factors they take into are:

- access to, into and inside the new or alternative branch - particularly for vulnerable consumers
- how the proposed change might affect any local community issues.

At the end of the consultation period Post Office Ltd writes to locally elected representatives, consumer advocacy bodies and selected charities. They confirm the decision made and respond to the key issues raised. The consultation outcome also gets published online and in branch.

The Post Office Consultation Hub publishes details of all consultations.

8.2.4 Principles of Community Engagement complaints

Consumers can make a Principles of Community Engagement complaint if they don't think Post Office Ltd has followed the process set out in the principles. They can't complain about the actual decision. It's a 2 stage process.

Stage 1: Consumer raises a complaint

Post Office Ltd will investigate the complaint. In their response Post Office Ltd will set out whether it thinks the Principles of Community Engagement has been followed. Consumers can complain to Post Office Ltd by:

- email: comments@postoffice.co.uk
- post: FREEPOST Your Comments - no other address details required
- phone: 03457 22 33 44
- textphone: 03457 22 33 55

Stage 2: Consumer contacts relevant consumer advocacy body

In their stage 1 response Post Office Ltd will provide the consumer with contact details for the relevant consumer advocacy body (Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice Scotland or the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland).

The relevant consumer advocacy body will:

- independently assess whether Post Office Ltd has followed the Principles of Community Engagement
- make recommendations about the complaint.

Citizens Advice contact details for this are:
postofficechanges@citizensadvice.org.uk

8.3 Post office products and services

A range of products and services are available. The post office website lists what's available in each branch.

8.3.1 Posting

- Sending in the UK - standard, signed and guaranteed Royal Mail services, Parcelforce services
- Sending abroad - standard, confirmed, guaranteed and economy Royal Mail services, Parcelforce services
- Regular senders - Drop and Go (a free, same-day service for regular senders to drop off parcels)
- Other post services - parcel returns and collections, mail redirection, Post Restante

There's no contract when post office staff sell Royal Mail USO services on behalf of Royal Mail. Consumer rights are what's set out in Royal Mail Schemes. This means compensation is limited - even if a customer relies on information from post office counter staff.

Normal contract law applies to Royal Mail non-USO services and other services the post office sells.

8.3.2 Banking and bills

- Everyday banking - customers are able to access their High Street bank account
- Post Office branded banking products - for example, savings or loans
- Bill payments and top-ups - energy, council tax, water, housing, rent, telephone, broadband and other bills
- Moneygram money transfer
- Travel money
- Post Office card account - provided on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions for people to get benefit payments. Using a bank account is now preferred.

8.3.3 Identity and licences

- Passports - get or renew a passport, get a passport application checked using the Check and Send service
- Driving - renew a driving licence, tax a vehicle, get an international driving permit
- Get ID certified
- Apply for a DBS check, biometric residence permit or rod fishing licence

8.3.4 Broadband and phone

- UK and international phone cards
- 118 555 Post Office Directory Enquiries
- Post Office broadband was bought by Shell Energy in February 2021

8.3.5 Insurance

- Policies for travel, home, life, motor, pets and gadgets

8.3.6 Travel

- Travel money - currency or travel money card
- Travel insurance
- Travel extras - airport services and National Express services

8.3.7 Gifting

- One4All gift card
- Collectible coins from the Royal Mint

8.3.8 Postal orders

Postal orders are a way to send money without needing a bank account. Only the post office can issue postal orders. Terms and conditions for postal orders are set out in a Scheme published in The Gazette.

How postal orders work	
1. The sender pays the post office an admin fee and the money they want to send.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • minimum issue £0.50 - maximum £250.00 • fees start at £0.50 and go up to £12.50

2. The post office issues the postal order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 'crossed' or 'uncrossed' ● crossed means 2 straight vertical lines through the order, just off centre
3. The postal order gets sent to the recipient.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● a postal order is valuable so needs to go special delivery
4. The recipient uses the postal order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● crossed - the recipient can only pay it into a bank account, savings account or use it to pay bills at a post office ● uncrossed - the recipient can swap the postal order for cash at a post office ● valid for 6 months from issue date ● might have to show ID to cash a postal order at a post office ● might not get paid if it fails post office validation checks

8.4 Complaints about post offices

Post office complaints means post office products and services:

- in-branch customer service
- branch opening hours or queues
- branch banking or bill payments
- Drop & Go service in branch - a free service for anyone who sends lots of parcels ¹.

Customers can complain to the post office by:

- filling in an [online form](#)²
- writing to FREEPOST, Post Office Customer Care Team, Bristol BS1 9HY
- phone 0345 722 3344
- textphone on 0345 722 3355.

Customers with complaints about Royal Mail or Parcelforce services bought in a post office need to contact Royal Mail or Parcelforce.

¹ <https://www.postoffice.co.uk/contact-us-complaint> & <https://www.postoffice.co.uk/default/dropandgo>

² <https://www.postoffice.co.uk/contact-us-complaint>

