



## Post Office News - March 2017

### **Last chance to respond to Citizens Advice work plan 2017/18 consultation**

Citizens Advice has a formal role representing consumers in the postal and energy markets, and this includes our post office policy work. Our work [plan](#) sets out our agenda for improving markets for consumers and is open for consultation until Thursday 9 March.

We welcome written responses from our stakeholders - you can email us directly or send responses to [adminteam-policyandadvocacy@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:adminteam-policyandadvocacy@citizensadvice.org.uk)

We have already had some meetings with stakeholders about the work plan, but there is still time for final conversations if this is helpful.

### **Post Office Ltd publishes annual Network Report**

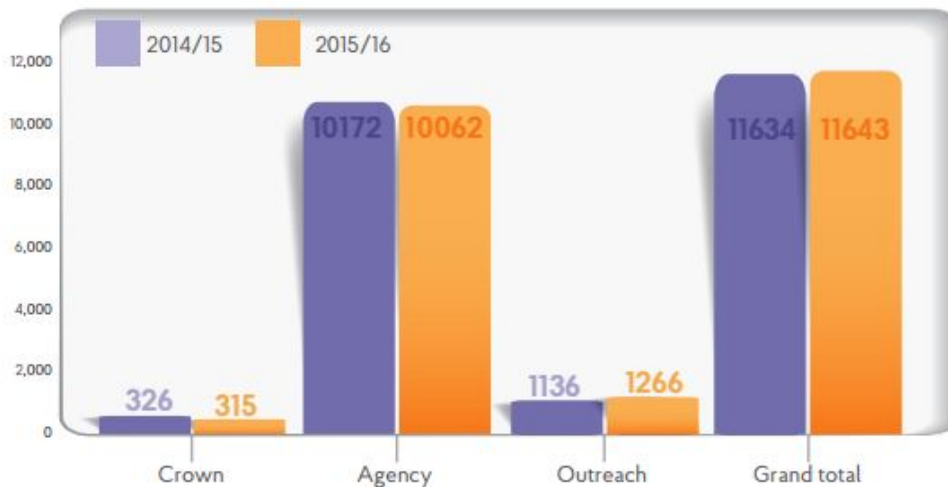
Details of the size and makeup of the post office network, as well as its accessibility and range of services are set out in Post Office Ltd's (POL) latest [annual network report](#).

The report shows little change in the size of the network over the last 6 years to March 2016.

There were 11,643 post offices at end of March 2016. An increase of 130 outreach branches - which include mobile vans - is greater than the drop in Crown and agency branches, delivering a net increase of 9 post offices in 2015/16.

POL also states that almost 93% of people in the UK live within 1 mile of a post office and 99.7% of people live within 3 miles of a post office. Over half (55%) of all post offices are based in rural areas, a third (34%) are in urban areas and 1 in 10 (11%) are in urban deprived areas.

### Post offices in 2014/15 and 2015/16



### Post Office reports 7,000th branch modernised

7,000 post offices have now been converted to new operating models, according to the latest [statement](#) from POL.

Under the Post Office Network Transformation Programme, the majority of traditional sub post offices are converting to the new Post Office Local and Post Office Main models. The programme started in 2012, and is due to end by April 2018. POL initially aimed for between 8,000 and 8,500 conversions.

The changes see post offices refurbished and integrated into retail outlets where the service is available for longer hours.

POL says that post offices now offer 1 million extra opening hours a month and customer queue times have fallen.

Recent Citizens Advice research looks at how the programme is impacting on consumers. This includes a [review](#) of customer experience and service standards in Post Office Locals, and a [study](#) of operators' perspectives of the new post office models.

Citizens Advice scrutinises all post office changes under the programme. We have overseen more than 1,000 conversions in each of the last 2 years and work with POL to secure improvements for consumers.

### Stamp prices rise

Royal Mail has announced that the price of first and second class will rise by 1p from 27 March. A stamp for large first class letter will rise by 2p to 98p.

First and second class stamp purchases are one of the most frequently used Post Office services. Recent [research](#) for Citizens Advice shows 72% of

consumers who use the Post Office at least fortnightly, use it to buy stamps. The numbers are higher amongst older people, with 85% of 55-74s buying stamps at post offices.

Citizens Advice has [stressed](#) the importance of affordable postal services, and the stamp price rises are broadly in line with inflation.

### **Royal Mail parcel service improvements**

From April Royal Mail is providing some enhancements to its parcel services.

Customers sending small and medium [parcels](#) at post offices will be able to see when their parcel has been delivered. Customers will be given a unique code when paying for postage, and can enter the code at [royalmail.com](http://royalmail.com) to see when the item has been delivered. The service has been available to online customers since January.

Royal Mail is also making it easier for customers returning items using the Royal Mail returns portal or buying postage online, to post or return parcels at its delivery offices. Under the new Labels to Go [service](#) customers will be able to print off delivery and return labels from their mobile phones at all of Royal Mail's 1,200 customer service [points](#) within delivery offices.

### **Additional post boxes to be installed**

Royal Mail is planning to [install](#) around 280 new post boxes in Northern Ireland by the spring, in order to improve accessibility. The new boxes will mainly be in rural areas, new housing developments and high footfall areas not currently served by a post box.

Royal Mail is [required](#) to provide 98% of the population with a post box (or post office) within half a mile of their address. There are currently 115,300 Royal Mail post boxes in the UK.

### **Post developments around the world**

The post sector is undergoing a period of transition not just in the UK, but also in many other parts of the world. Some recent developments from abroad:

- **Republic of Ireland:** The Irish Parliament voted on 22 February to reject a government amendment aimed at speeding up a decision by the postal services regulator on whether or not to remove a cap on postal [prices](#). The government is keen to give the national postal service operator greater pricing freedom in order to recover from its current financial difficulties. The government recently announced the second review of An Post in less than 12 months, aimed at identifying structural

changes to place the company - which made a loss of €32 million last year - on a sustainable footing.

- **Canada:** The Canadian Postal Workers Union is calling on the government to bring back postal banking for rural communities. The Union claims that the return to postal banking would be a win for local communities while also contributing to the financial sustainability of Canada Post. According to the Union, 1,200 Canadian communities currently have a post office but no bank branch or credit union branch. An ongoing federal government review of Canada Post is expected to report in June 2017.
- **USA:** The US Congress has introduced a bill aimed at reforming the US Postal Service and returning it to financial stability. Among other measures, the legislation will allow for an increase of 2.15% to postal rates. The Postal Service is struggling to reach financial sustainability and last year reported a net loss of \$5.6 billion (£4.5 billion).

### ***Post Offices Advisory Group***

*As part of our role as the consumer champion for post, we host a quarterly conference on post office issues. If you would be interested in joining the group, please contact [Annabel.Barnett@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:Annabel.Barnett@citizensadvice.org.uk).*

*Follow our Twitter account for regular updates: [@CABPost](https://twitter.com/CABPost)*