



## Overview and Scrutiny Committee 11<sup>th</sup> December 2007

### Report from the Director of Policy and Regeneration

For Action

Wards Affected:  
ALL

## Post Office closures in Brent

Forward Plan Ref:

### 1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the details on the Government decision to close 2,500 Post Offices in the UK and provides a proposal for how LB Brent can respond.

### 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to set up an Overview and Scrutiny task group to respond to proposals for Post office closures in Brent

### 3.0 Background

- 3.1 Post Offices play a crucial role in local communities especially for vulnerable people who are able to gain easy local access to cash their pensions and benefits. Post offices can also have a positive effect on other local businesses as people visiting them also visit other local shops.
- 3.2 Over the last few years Post Offices have lost much of their core business, this is in part due to loss of contracts to issue TV and driving licenses. Technological advances has also meant that more transactions take place over the internet and by telephone.
- 3.3 In May this year, following a three month consultation the Secretary of State for the Department of Trade and Industry, announced that 2,500 Post Offices would be closing over the next 18 months. The government argued that these changes were necessary to secure the future viability of the network.

## **Criteria for Closures**

- 3.4 The criteria for closures is aiming to target areas of over provision and those that are least used. The method for determining which post offices will close is:

In Urban areas 95% of people should live within a mile of a post office

In deprived urban areas 99% of the population should live within a mile of a post office

- 3.5 An additional criterion has also been developed based on postcode district to ensure that there is not a large geographical area without a Post Office. This is more likely to be applicable to rural areas but is also helps to ensure that any closures are based on local rather than national criteria.

In addition for each individual postcode district:

95% of the population of the postcode district to be within six miles of their nearest post office outlet

## **4.0 Implications for Brent**

- 4.1 The new criteria is a departure from the previous closure programme in which urban deprived post offices were protected with 99% of the population required to live within 0.5 mile of a post office, this has now changed to one mile. This indicates that urban deprived post offices are likely to be the most affected.

- 4.2 London councils has estimated that there is likely to be a 17.5% reduction of post offices in London, this could be up to five closures in every London Borough. However there may not be an even spread of closures across local authority areas in which case Brent may or may not be disproportionately affected.

- 4.3 It is important that the council carry out its own assessment of the viability of each post office earmarked for closure, working with local partners and drawing on local knowledge to ensure that Brent residents are not adversely affected, especially the most vulnerable members of the community.

## **5.0 Closure Timetable**

- 5.1 The public consultation has been brought forward from April to February 2008. It will begin on the 18<sup>th</sup> February and last for six weeks so as not to clash with the purdah period for the London Mayoral elections.

- 5.2 London Boroughs are still awaiting clarity on when they will be informed of the closure proposals. Post Office Ltd originally indicated that councils would be informed at the time of the public consultation but could hold confidential briefings with individual councils prior to this if there were mitigating circumstances that could affect closures.

- 5.3 Councils have long been concerned that the six week public consultation period is too short and does not allow enough time to prepare a comprehensive response to the proposals. Post Office Ltd has argued that it is necessary to keep the public consultation period short to minimise the uncertainty for those post offices which are earmarked for closure.

5.4 London Councils and the LGA are meeting with Post Office Limited in late November early December to discuss the possibility of all London Boroughs gaining confidential information of the specific closure proposals prior to the public consultation.

## **6.0 Next Steps**

6.1 During the last round of Post Office closures, an overview task group was set up to respond to a consultation to close seven Post Offices in Brent. As a result of their work, one remained open with a further two were kept open until an alternative location was found. The success of this work was based on developing a clear evidence based argument on the proposals.

6.2 Members of this committee are asked to establish an overview and scrutiny task group to provide a detailed response to proposals for Post Office closures in Brent using the same rigorous criteria.

### Contact Officers

Phil Newby  
Director Policy and Regeneration  
[Phil.newby@brent.gov.uk](mailto:Phil.newby@brent.gov.uk)  
Tel: 0208937 1032

Stella Akintan  
Policy and Performance Officer  
[stella.akintan@brent.gov.uk](mailto:stella.akintan@brent.gov.uk)  
Tel: 0208937 1034