



Dr Therese Coffey MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

12 July 2010

Dear Ms Coffey

I have been asked to reply to you directly on the Parliamentary Question that you recently raised as follows;

'To ask the Secretary of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, if he will undertake a review of the performance of Post Office Ltd in delivering outreach services for the purposes of increasing its effectiveness, with particular reference to services in Wangford in Suffolk'

You will be aware that in May 2007 the Government announced a range of proposed measures to modernise and reshape the network of Post Office® branches and to put it on a more stable footing. This included the Network Change programme which established minimum access criteria to the Post Office network and included the closure of around 2500 Post Offices and the introduction of 500 new outreach services.

The minimum access criteria established by Government are as follows;

- *Nationally, 99% of the UK population to be within 3 miles and 90% of the population to be within 1 mile of their nearest post office outlet.*
- *99% of the total population in deprived urban areas across the UK to be within 1 mile of their nearest post office outlet.*
- *95% of the total urban population across the UK to be within 1 mile of their nearest post office outlet.*
- *95% of the total rural population across the UK to be within 3 miles of their nearest post office outlet.*
- *95% of the population of the postcode district to be within 6 miles of their nearest post office outlet.*

The Outreach service concepts established as part of the Network Change Programme built on the previous trials that had taken place and also on a number of mobile and satellite Post Office services that were already in place across the country. The Outreach concepts provide the flexibility for the continuation of Post Office services where it is not possible to provide a traditional Post Office branch model or where this would be unviable for either Post Office Limited or the local subpostmaster.



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For the majority of Outreach services, an established subpostmaster (known as the “core” subpostmaster) will travel to, or oversee service at, a nearby community to provide a local Post Office service in addition to running their own Post Office branch. This enables Post Office Limited to maintain a service in smaller communities in addition to supporting existing branches. The various forms of outreach are as follows;

Mobile Post Office®

A mobile Post Office® is a modern, fully equipped van offering Post Office® services. The mobile van visits communities at set times and days each week, and the majority of Post Office® products and services are available through the Mobile service. These vehicles have an access lift at the back to assist elderly or disabled customers.

Hosted service

The hosted service is operated from a local community building such as a cafe, village hall or community centre at set times and days each week, with space set aside at these premises for the portable Post Office® computer equipment. This enables customers to access the majority of Post Office® products and services at these locations.

Partner service

The partner service is combined in an existing retail premises and the local partner (such as the shop-owner), provides a slightly reduced range of Post Office® products and services from their premises. More than 80% of the full range of Post Office® products and services are available through the partner service and services are generally available during the same opening hours as the partner’s retail business.

Home delivery service

This is a service for very small communities and enables customers to order a reduced range of Post Office® products and services over the telephone. The products may either be delivered to a customer’s home by the core subpostmaster or are available for collection by the customer at a local Drop-In Session.

The Outreach concept has proven to be a flexible solution to the provision of services and figures at the end of March show that there were 11905 open Post Offices with 230 villages receiving services from a Mobile Post Office, 370 Hosted services, 118 Partner services and 54 Home delivery services. In addition there are also 161 Satellite services in place.

As well as Outreach services Post Office Limited has also introduced the Post Office Essentials format which is a pilot model that incorporates a range of Post Office services into an existing retailers offer providing customers with a range of



key Post Office® products and services alongside the longer opening hours provided by the operator. There are currently 48 Post Office essential pilots.

As you are aware the Outreach service that was operating from the Community Centre in Wangford regrettably closed in June 2009 following the resignation of the Subpostmaster from operating the service. Unfortunately we have been unable to establish a replacement service in this location despite the various Post Office models at our disposal.

We recently carried out a mailshot to neighbouring Subpostmasters, within a 25 mile radius, who fit the profile to offer an outreach service to see if they would be willing to operate a service to Wangford but no one has come forward. Also, we have contacted the ex-subpostmistress to see if they would be interested in operating a service but this too has not proved successful.

The situation regarding the Wangford outreach service is clearly difficult. Whilst it is very unusual, as the vast majority of outreach services are operating continuously and providing a high level of service to our customers, I do recognise that this will be of little consolation to our customers in Wangford.

Our field team is urgently seeking a meeting with the Parish Council to update them and to see if they can help us to find a viable solution in Wangford and we will continue to explore alternatives in the village.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D Smith", written over a faint circular stamp.

David Smith
Managing Director