



## Post Office News - May 2017

### MPs debate post office closures

Post office closures were the main focus of a Westminster Hall [debate](#) on Tuesday 25 April. Tim Loughton MP moved the debate prompted by concerns in his own constituency, and raised questions about future sustainability of the post office network.

Many MPs expressed interest and concern about post offices, citing specific examples in their constituencies. They shared views on the importance of post offices as a vital source of financial services and a community hub, particularly for rural and digitally excluded consumers. Questions were asked about possible future work with credit unions and innovations such as a postal bank, similar to the Banque Postale in France.

Margot James MP, Minister for Postal Services, stated that the network is currently at its most stable, thanks to the Network Transformation Programme (NTP), and agreed that future government investment is needed in the postal service. The Minister also emphasised Crown branches are not subject to closure but are being proposed as franchises to make them more efficient, and the network more sustainable as a whole.

In reference to MPs' concerns about limited access to post offices in more deprived areas, Margot James revealed that 'the Post Office is revisiting some poorer urban areas where it closed branches 10 years ago, to talk to retailers about setting up a local post office counter'.

Citizens Advice sent a [briefing](#) to MPs prior to the debate.

The Government is yet to respond to the [consultation](#) on the future of the network and confirm its funding for the post office network for 2018-21.

## **Citizens Advice video on disabled customers and solution development**

Almost 1 in 3 disabled and older people use a post office each week. 9 in 10 disabled and older consumers describe the Post Office as 'essential'.

In a new [video](#), Citizens Advice shows the varied experiences of consumers with disabilities. We asked people with a range of different impairments and conditions to visit a new model post office and tell us about it. The video looks at getting into the post office, getting around inside the branch, waiting at the counter, staff, and how the experience could be improved.

Citizens Advice will also be publishing a report on disabled people's use of post offices later in the year. We are starting to develop solutions - if you would like to help us please contact [Tim.Schein@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:Tim.Schein@citizensadvice.org.uk).

## **Alternative postal service providers plan expansion**

CollectPlus - the UK's second biggest high street parcel services provider after the Post Office - says it now operates through 6,000 outlets. In a recent interview the company [reported](#) that 91% of the UK's urban population now live within 1 mile of a CollectPlus parcel store, and almost 90% of the rural population are within 5 miles. Currently CollectPlus only offers Yodel parcel services, but the company plans to expand its services and offer parcel sending, returns and click and collect with other carriers.

The Post Office has 11,600 [branches](#), 95.5% of the urban population live within 1 mile and 98.7% of the rural population live within 3 miles of a post office.

Separately, delivery company Whistl is [promoting](#) letter services alongside its parcel services. Whistl says by using its services, consumers can save up to 35% on the price of second class stamps. Consumers using Whistl's postal services can drop off items at outlets including [UPS](#) Access Points or have them collected. Items are delivered by Royal Mail.

Citizens Advice will be publishing new data on consumer use of different postal service providers later this year.

## **Royal Mail moves to protect consumers from scam mail**

Fraud and scam mail, often in the form of lotteries and prize draws, is an issue with particular risks for older people and other vulnerable groups.

Following a range of anti-scam initiatives, including the annual Citizens Advice Scams [Awareness](#) Month, Royal Mail says it has successfully stopped more than 700,000 scam items from reaching its customers since November.

As part of its ongoing [strategy](#), Royal Mail will begin contacting households it believes are receiving high volumes of scam mail. Royal Mail is now blocking scam mail at its major distribution centres before the mail can reach vulnerable customers' letterboxes.

### **Citizens Advice manifesto for the next government**

As the political parties develop their manifestos in the run up to the general election, Citizens Advice has published its [manifesto](#) for the next Government.

The Citizens Advice manifesto sets out a range of policy asks. These include protecting post offices from closure so vulnerable people and those in rural areas continue to have access to post and banking services

### ***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](#)*