

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: POST OFFICE LTD – NETWORK CHANGE PROGRAMME
Meeting: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
Date: 9 SEPTEMBER 2008
Author: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Members will be aware that Post Office Ltd published plans on 19 August 2008 outlining the future of the Post Office Network in Linlithgow and Falkirk East Parliamentary Constituency. This report notes the proposal to close Grangepans post office in Bo'ness and sets out a proposed response to this.

2. THE PLANS

- 2.1 The following post offices are covered by the plans recently published:

- Avonbridge;
- Bo'ness;
- California;
- Charlotte Dundas Court;
- Grangemouth;
- Grangepans;
- Limerigg;
- Maddiston;
- Maidenpark;
- Newtown;
- Slamannan; and
- Whitecross

- 2.2 Post Office Ltd has proposed that Grangepans is to close. The closing date for responses to the proposal is 23 September 2008.

3. NETWORK CHANGE PROGRAMME

- 3.1 The criteria that Post Office Ltd use to assess each post office are as follows and this covers the whole of the UK:

- 3.2 Nationally

- 99% of the total UK population within 3 miles, 90% within 1 mile;

- 95% of total urban populations within 1 mile (urban classed as settlement more than 10,000);
- 95% of total rural population within 3 miles (rural is classified as settlement less than 10,000);
- 99% of urban deprived within 1 mile (15% of UK postcode districts); and
- Proportionality, such that no group or area plan should be more adversely impacted than any other (hard to do as announcements made on rolling programme - but split should be 50/50 urban / rural).

3.3 Local factors

- Availability of parking and public transport (to and from post office);
- Local demographics (age/disability/car ownership/income); and
- Impact on local economies.

3.4 Once plans are published, there is a six week period during which the public and the Council can respond to these proposals. As part of this process we have already put the proposals on the Council web-site. Experience from the previous consultation exercise would suggest that account is taken of the volume and number of representations made regarding each post office. It is therefore important that where local people feel strongly about any closure plans, they make their feelings known to Post Office Ltd. However, Members should be aware that generally, if a post office is retained, an alternate post office branch is nominated for closure.

4. CURRENT SITUATION

4.1 Prior to the plan being announced, Postwatch estimated that, if there was an even distribution of closures across the UK, 17.5% of post offices would close in every area. That would equate to approximately 5 post offices in the constituency of Falkirk and 3 in Falkirk East. As Members will recall, 7 post offices were closed in the Falkirk constituency, while only one post office is identified for closure in this round.

4.2 The Post Office Ltd has provided Branch Access Reports on the post office proposed for closure and the post offices that they anticipate local residents would use if this post office is closed. This access report is attached as Appendix 1.

4.3 The following paragraphs note some of the points the Council will make when presenting the case for the retention for Grangepans post office.

Grangepans

4.4 Grangepans post office is situated within Bo'ness. The post office is open 38 hours per week and is within a small convenience store. Post Office Ltd has suggested that there are two alternative post offices, the first post office is 0.7 miles away in Bo'ness Town Centre and the second is 0.9 miles away in Newtown in Bo'ness. Post Office Ltd has provided information on the bus services from the bus stop 110 yards from Grangepans post office to Bo'ness post office. A half hourly bus service runs between these two post offices this has been confirmed by the Transport Planning Unit. There are plans to develop and enhance Bo'ness town centre over the next few years and the population of Bo'ness is expected to increase significantly.

4.5 According to the 2006 estimates of population, there are 9,250 people living within 1 mile of Grangepans post office. Of these 16.3% are aged above 65 years. This compares to the Falkirk Council and the Scottish average of 15.8% and 16.4% respectively. 18.6 % of those living within a one mile radius of Grangepans post office are claiming State Pension, this compares to 18.3% of the population of Falkirk Council and the Scottish average of 19%.

4.6 The table below contains information from the census on the percentage of the population living within one mile of Grangepans post office with poor health. It is assumed that these individuals would find it more difficult to travel even short distances to access services.

Table 4: Long term illness and general health – 2001 Census

| Post Office | Household population 2001 Census | With a limiting long term illness* | | General health poor | |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|
| | | No | % | No | % |
| Grangepans | 8,344 | 1,757 | 21.1% | 857 | 10.3% |
| Falkirk | 143,457 | 29,380 | 20.5% | 14,642 | 10.2% |
| Scotland | 4,976,005 | 978,376 | 19.7% | 492,283 | 9.9% |

Source: 2001 Census, General Register Office for Scotland, Crown Copyright

* includes problems due to age

4.7 The one mile radius catchment of the Grangepans post office consists of sixteen datazones or part datazones, one of which is in the worst 15% in Scotland. Of the datazones within one mile of the Grangepans post office, access to a post office is above the Falkirk average (2.1 minutes) and the Scottish average (2.2 minutes) in three datazones. Public transport travel time to a Post Office is also above the Falkirk average (6.7 minutes) in four datazones and the Scottish average (8.2 minutes) in two datazones. Closing the Grangepans post office will undoubtedly make these access measures significantly worse. An analysis carried out by the Council shows that there are currently 135 households within the Falkirk Council area outwith a 3 mile radius of Grangepans post office and it would be expected that Grangepans would be the first choice post office. If Grangepans were to close, an additional 101 households will now be outwith a 3 mile radius of a Post Office.

5. WAY FORWARD

5.1 The Council recognises the important social function that post offices provide. In our communities, the post office can also be the main village or local shop. These post offices are used by older people, people with young children and those with mobility problems, for a whole variety of transactions, not just economic, but social.

5.2 The 6 week consultation process began on 19 August 2008. At the time of writing, analysis on each of the post offices has only just begun. Officers are continuing to develop a case for retention for Grangepans to supplement the information contained in section 3. This will be presented to Post Office Ltd by 23 September 2008, the closing date for submissions.

- 5.3 Council Officers have written to Community Council in Bo'ness and Blackness alerting them to the potential closure, with information about how they can respond to these.

6. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Members:

- 6.1 **Ask that Officers put together a case for the retention of the Grangepans Post Office and submit this to Post Office Ltd by 23 September 2008.**

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Date: 26 August 2008

Ref: ABH0908LG

Contact Name: Fiona Campbell

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Department of Trade and Industry – The Post Office Network – Government Response to public consultation – May 2007
2. Department of Trade and Industry – the Post Office Network – Consultation Document – December 2006.
3. Postwatch – Invitation to Post Office Closures Seminar – May 2007

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone Falkirk 01324 506004 and ask for