

**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**

**CABINET – 2<sup>ND</sup> JUNE 2008**

**POST OFFICE CLOSURES IN TELFORD AND WREKIN**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR: COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To report on the information gathered from the post offices that have been proposed for closure in Telford and Wrekin, and to recommend how Telford and Wrekin Council should respond to the proposals.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the Post Offices which are under threat and opposing closure be supported in their case to remain open through a submission from Telford and Wrekin Council to Post Offices Ltd.
- 2.2 That the network development manager for Post Offices Ltd and Post Watch be invited to meet the Council to hear the cases against closure prior to the consultation period ending.

**3. SUMMARY**

On April 1<sup>st</sup> 2008 Post Office Ltd announced the proposed closure of 4 post offices in the Telford and Wrekin area. The post offices affected are Church Aston, Randlay, Sambrook and Wellington Park Corner.

Consultation with parish councils and post masters has highlighted concern over the consultation process and the evidence that has been used to make the decisions on which post offices should be closed.

Randlay has a large campaign running working with the community and Hollinswood & Randlay Parish Council. Church Aston and Wellington have petitions circulating in the community and Wellington Town Council and Church Aston Parish Council have written letters opposing the closures. We are not aware of any campaign that has been developed by the local community against the closure of Sambrook, the Chetwynd and Woodcote Parish Council have not made any public statement and the post master is not making a case to remain open.

**4. PREVIOUS MINUTES**

Not applicable

## **5. INFORMATION**

### **5.1 Background**

At the end of 2006 the Government carried out a 12 week national public consultation, on a range of proposed measures to modernise and reshape the network and put it on a more stable financial footing. This response was published in May 2007. As a result of this Post Office Ltd put in place a Network Change Programme which involves the compulsory compensated closure of up to 2,500 branches. It is planned that 500 of these will be replaced with "Outreach" service points.

The public consultation for the Shropshire and Staffordshire area started on 1st April 2008 when the proposal was released, the consultation period finishes on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> June. Subject to the conclusion of the local public consultation period and after consideration of feedback received, no changes would be implemented before August 2008.

Four post offices in the Telford and Wrekin area have been identified for closure by Post Office Ltd. These are Church Aston, Randlay, Sambrook and Wellington Park Corner. In each case an alternative post office has been identified however no "outreach" service is being offered as has been provided in Shropshire.

Contact has been made with both the postmasters and the Parish Councils in these areas to monitor public opinion and to assess the impact that closures will have on their communities.

### **5.2 Key points from consultation**

From this consultation key points have been highlighted in relation to the closures.

- There is a perception that the post offices being proposed for closure have been selected using a crude geographical calculation. No account has been taken of how the communities surrounding them work and the contribution that post offices play as part of wider community life.
- No account is being taken of new developments and regeneration schemes being proposed in Telford, specifically at Randlay local centre.
- There are two alternatives offered for Randlay, the town centre which already has an issue with capacity and would require customers to pay for parking. There is also a distance from car parks and the bus station which would particularly impact upon older people and those with mobility issues.
- The second alternative is Brookside which a lot of Randlay customers would choose not to use, due to its position at the centre of the estate.
- Church Aston Parish Council fears that older people will find it difficult to get into Newport. Parking is not easy in Newport either.

- Sambrook Post Master feels that closure is inevitable and there's no point in opposing the proposal however the villages around Sambrook have already lost many of their local services so people are having to travel further to access them. There are no direct bus services to the alternative post offices.
- The Wellington Post Mistress has said that many of their customers are distressed by the impending closure and that the loss of the post office will be a significant loss to the town.

### **5.3 The cases against closure**

#### **Randlay**

- Is used by up to 1000 customers every week
- A development scheme to include a new supermarket and Post Office is commencing in Autumn 2008
- There will also be a major housing development in the area before 2012
- There is no free parking at the Town Centre, which is proposed as an alternative
- The Post Office provides a service to the near by Stafford Park Industrial Estate and a parcel service for small Businesses which generates 15-50 mail sacks daily
- 25% of the population in the catchment area have no car
- Hollinswood and Randlay Parish Council are making a submission to Post Office Ltd opposing the closure

#### **Wellington – Park Corner**

- Is used by up to 750 customers every week
- 17% of people in the catchment area are retired and 26% do not have a car
- It is a particular resource for elderly and infirm people in the area
- There is significant regeneration work being undertaken in the Town
- Wellington Town Council have written to Post Office Ltd opposing the closure

#### **Church Aston**

- Is used by up to 300 people each week
- Closure of the Post Office will also lead to the closure of the convenience store which is the only shop in the village
- 20% of the population in the catchment area are retired and 19% do not have a car
- Parking and access to the alternative proposed in Newport is restricted
- Church Aston Parish Council have opposed the closure

#### **Sambrook**

- Is used by up to 50 people each week

- It is a very rural area with no other services based within 2 miles of the village
- 21% of the catchment area are retired, 11% do not have a car
- There is no public transport available to the alternatives proposed
- The route to the alternative is 2 miles via country lanes
- The convenience store will close if the Post Office is closed

## **6.0 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY**

Local post offices play a vital role in the community and shutting them down will result in:-

- Problems for the elderly and disabled and for anyone with restricted mobility, such as mothers with young children who may experience difficulty travelling to branches further away.
- Transportation problems for many people, especially those without private transport, who will have to rely on and pay for public transport.

## **7.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

It is very likely that there will be increased car use as people will have to travel further to access the alternative branches. This will be especially the case in the rural areas.

## **8.0 LEGAL COMMENT**

The Council has powers to act in support of post offices under threat, under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 (promotion of economic, social or environmental well-being). Other than this, there are no legal implications for the Council arising directly out of this report.

## **9.0 LINKS WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

Priority 4: Creating a Safe, Strong and Cohesive Community

Priority 5: Promoting Healthy Communities and Improving the Quality of Life of Vulnerable and Older People

Priority 6: Strengthening the Local Economy

## **10.0 OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS**

The opportunities and risks associated with this decision have been identified and assessed. Arrangements will be put in place to manage the risks and maximise the opportunities that have been identified.

By approving this decision Telford & Wrekin Council will be assisting in highlighting the position of vulnerable people losing access to valuable services and will be supporting the communities in their opposition to the closures.

### **11.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Officer time involved in producing submissions to support local post offices to Post Office Ltd will be met from within existing resources.

### **12.0 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

Four wards are affected by the closures these are:

- Church Aston & Lilleshall
- The Nedge
- Edgmond
- College / Park

### **13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Post Office Ltd consultation papers -

<http://www.postoffice.co.uk/portal/po/content1?catId=57600693&mediaId=57600697>

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