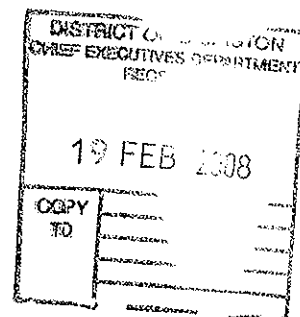


postwatch

Janet Johnson
Chief Executive
Easington District Council
Council Offices
Seaside Lane
EASINGTON
SR8 5TN



18 February 2008

Dear Mrs Johnson,

Post Office Closure Programme – North East Plan 1 Cleveland with South Durham and Richmond

Post Office Ltd's six week public consultation on post office closures in Cleveland with South Durham and Richmond commenced on 12 February 2008. Post Office Ltd has proposed the closure of 37 branches in this area, with a further 2 branches to be replaced by outreach services. A total of 196 post offices will remain unchanged and these, together with the proposed outreach services, will continue to serve customers in the area. I thought it would be helpful if I set out Postwatch Northern England's initial views on the proposals, and our role in the weeks ahead.

Post Office Ltd's public consultation in this area covers and has affected the following Westminster parliamentary constituencies:

Constituency	MP
Bishop Auckland	Helen Goodman
Darlington	Alan Milburn
Hartlepool	Iain Wright
Middlesbrough	Stuart Bell
Middlesbrough South & East Cleveland	Ashok Kumar
Redcar	Vera Baird
Richmond	William Hague
Sedgefield	Phil Wilson
Stockton North	Frank Cook
Stockton South	Dari Taylor

Eleven weeks before the start of public consultation, Postwatch Northern England received Post Office Ltd's plans for this area on a confidential basis. Two weeks after we received the proposals, Post Office Ltd started confidential commercial discussions with the sub-postmasters concerned.

Customer complaints T 08456 013265
Postwatch Northern England, Devere House
Vicar Lane, Little Germany, Bradford BD1 5AH
F 01274 730372
E north@postwatch.co.uk W www.postwatch.co.uk

Postwatch has scrutinised and provided initial comments on these proposals. As a result, Post Office Ltd has made amendments to their original plan. As prescribed by the Government, our focus has been on whether Post Office Ltd's proposals meet the minimum access criteria for post offices, which aim to ensure communities are within a reasonable distance from a post office. We also examined whether local factors – such as public transport arrangements, relevant topographical features, demographics and the impact on the local economy – had been properly considered.

We welcome Post Office Ltd's changes to their original plan, and we believe the proposals meet the minimum distance criteria set by Government. Nonetheless, there are still several aspects of their proposals that we are concerned about. Specifically:

- the proposed closure of two branches on the north side of Northallerton in the Richmond Constituency, leading to further congestion at the main Northallerton Post Office at the southern end of the long High Street
- the impact on staffing levels and levels of service at the Hartlepool Crown office with the closure of two sizeable branches within a mile of this office
- the possible loss of last remaining shops in some of the villages identified for closure of their post office
- we do not believe Post Office Limited has fully addressed the possible impact on local economies surrounding some of these proposed closures in particular those offices serving those living in or close to urban deprived areas, for example, Hopetown PO in the Darlington Constituency, Simpasture PO in the Sedgefield Constituency and Cowpen Estate PO in Stockton North Constituency

We have raised these issues with Post Office Ltd and we will continue to do so during public consultation.

We also have concerns about access, DDA compliance, capacity and retail standards issues at a number of the branches to which customers will be expected to migrate. We have also raised these issues with Post Office Ltd.

However, this is only our initial view. Our final position will be informed by customers' responses to Post Office Ltd. We are therefore keen that customers express their views on these proposals.

Postwatch Northern England wants customers and stakeholders to express their opinions about **all** Post Office Ltd's proposals. We will be working throughout the consultation period to ensure the exercise is meaningful. Post Office Ltd should use

the consultation as an opportunity to engage with customers – to set out clearly the proposed changes, and be responsive to feedback. Likewise, we will be working to encourage customer participation to be constructive, as this will help secure a better outcome for customers. At the end of the consultation period, we will write to Post Office Ltd to set out our final view. This letter will be publicly available on our website www.postwatch.co.uk.

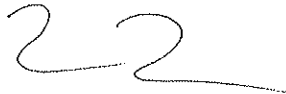
We hope you will be able to give your views on the proposals to Post Office Ltd. This can be done by writing to **National Consultation Team, Post Office Ltd, FREEPOST CONSULTATION TEAM**, or emailing consultation@postoffice.co.uk.

If possible, we would be grateful if you could also provide Postwatch Northern England with a copy of your response, either via email: north@postwatch.co.uk or by post:

Postwatch Northern England
Devere House
Vicar Lane
Little Germany
Bradford
BD1 5AH

If you have queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Judith Donovan CBE
Regional Chairman