

Report to: **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **16<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

Report of: **Report of the Scrutiny Support Manager**

Subject: **Post Office Ltd Network Change Programme -  
Area Plan Proposal for Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham**

Ward: **Acre Rigg, Blackhalls, Dawdon, Dene House, Deneside, Easington Colliery,  
Easington Village and South Hetton, Eden Hill, Haswell and Shotton, Horden  
South, Hutton Henry, Murton East, Murton West, Passfield, Seaham Harbour  
and Seaham North**

## **1.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To advise the Committee of the final decisions made by Post Office Ltd in respect of their Network Change Programme Area Plan Proposal for Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham and its implications for residents of the District.

## **2.0 Consultation**

- 2.1 As part of the public consultation exercise, the Committee consulted with the District Councillors for the affected wards, the Executive Member for Regeneration, the Executive Member for Social Inclusion and Culture, the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Engagement and Communications, the Head of Regeneration and Partnerships, the Principal Regeneration Officer and the Marketing and Communications Manager.

## **3.0 Background**

- 3.1 The Community Services Scrutiny Committee have previously considered my report outlining the Post Office Ltd Network Change Programme Area Plan Proposal for Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham. As part of that exercise and following consultations with Parish and Town Councils, the Committee made representations which called for the retention of the Post Office Facilities identified for closure at Easington Colliery, Salters Lane, Shotton Colliery and Yoden Road, Peterlee, in light of the adverse affect that the closure would have on some of the District's more vulnerable residents. A copy of the letter to Post Office Ltd is attached at Appendix A.

## **4.0 Position Statement**

- 4.1 The Council has received on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2008 the Area Plan Booklet for Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham which details information regarding the Area Plan and the final decisions made by Post Office Ltd in respect of each proposed branch closure.
- 4.2 The public consultation exercise for the Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham area closed on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2008.
- 4.3 Post Office Ltd attended 37 meetings with customers and their representatives to generate feedback and to gather an understanding of the local issues of particular concern. They received some 3530 pieces of correspondence, which was acknowledged recorded and considered alongside all other information and feedback.
- 4.4 A summary of the feedback has been shared with Postwatch, the independent watchdog for postal services and feedback given by Postwatch on those issues raised by consumers directly with them.

## **5.0 Impact on Area Plan Proposals upon the District of Easington**

- 5.1 Post Office Ltd have determined that notwithstanding the representations made during the consultation exercise, they are progressing with the closure of the Easington Colliery, Salters Lane, Shotton Colliery and Yoden Road, Peterlee Branches.
- 5.2 The following extracts have been taken from the Area Plan Decision Booklet for Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham and highlight the views of the Post Office LTD in coming to their decision about the three offices that are to close:-

### **“Post Office® Easington Colliery branch**

A relatively small number of responses were received during the local public consultation period regarding Post Office Limited's proposal to close this branch. The main concerns expressed by respondents related to the importance of Post Office® Easington Colliery branch to the community, especially elderly and disabled people. Respondents also commented that Post Office® Easington Colliery branch provided the only ATM in the area.

Post Office Limited has considered all responses received during the local public consultation and a review of this proposal has been undertaken. The second nearest alternative branch, Post Office® Easington branch, is just over one mile away from Post Office® Easington Colliery branch and has parking nearby. There is a regular bus service to this branch which offers the same wide range of Post Office® services including collecting cash using everyday banking services and has longer opening hours than Post Office® Easington Colliery branch.

The nearest alternative branch, Post Office® Seaside Lane branch, is temporarily closed following subsidence, but is expected to re-open in the near future. This branch has level access and is less than half a mile away from Post Office® Easington Colliery branch. There is a third alternative branch, Post Office® Horden branch, which is just over two miles away from Post Office® Easington Colliery branch and roadside parking is available outside this branch. This branch also offers the same wide range of Post Office® services including collecting cash using everyday banking services with the addition of Euro on Demand currency.

Taking these and all other relevant factors into account, including the needs of more vulnerable customers, Post Office Limited has decided to proceed with the proposed closure of Post Office® Easington Colliery branch.

### **Post Office® Salters Lane branch**

A relatively small number of responses were received during the local public consultation period in relation to Post Office Limited's proposal to close Post Office® Salters Lane branch. The main concerns expressed by respondents in relation to our proposal to close Post Office® Salters Lane branch concerned the potential effect of the proposed closure on local elderly people, who respondents said rely on this branch and that there is no other access to banking facilities in the area.

Post Office Limited has considered all responses received during the local public consultation, and a review of this proposal has been undertaken. The nearest alternative Post Office® branch, Post Office® Shotton Colliery branch, is approximately half a mile away, and has off road parking available. Post Office® Shotton Colliery branch has level access at its entrance to assist customers with mobility difficulties and a regular bus service operates to Post Office® Shotton Colliery branch from the Salters Lane area.

The second nearest alternative branch, Post Office® Wheatley Hill branch, is approximately a mile and a half away and on street parking is available nearby. There is a bus service approximately every hour from the Salters Lane area to Post Office®

Wheatley Hill branch. In addition ATM facilities are available at the convenience store located next door to the branch.

Taking these and all other relevant factors into account, including the needs of more vulnerable customers, Post Office Limited has decided to proceed with the proposed closure of Post Office® Salters Lane branch.

#### **Post Office® Yoden Road branch (temporarily closed)**

No responses were received during the local public consultation period in relation to Post Office Limited's proposal to permanently close this branch.

Post Office Limited has however undertaken a review of this proposal. The nearest alternative branch, Post Office® York Road branch, is just over half a mile away and car parking is available nearby. Post Office® York Road branch has level access at its entrance and a wide door to assist customers with mobility difficulties. A regular bus service operates to Post Office® York Road branch from the Yoden Road area.

The second nearest alternative branch, Post Office® Peterlee branch is less than a mile away and car parking is also available near this branch. Post Office® Peterlee branch has level access at its entrance and a wide door to assist customers with mobility difficulties. Post Office® Peterlee branch also offers a wider range of Post Office® products and services than Post Office® Yoden Road branch, including car tax payments and on demand Bureau de Change. A regular bus service operates from the Yoden Road area into Peterlee.

Taking these and all other relevant factors into account, including the needs of more vulnerable customers, Post Office Limited has decided to proceed with the proposed permanent closure of Post Office® Yoden Road branch."

## **6.0 Policy, Legal, Financial and Risk Implications**

### **6.1 Policy Implications**

There are no policy implications.

### **6.2 Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications

### **6.3 Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications

### **6.4 Risk Implications**

A risk assessment has been undertaken and at this stage the risks identified are within the corporate appetite.

### **6.5 Communications Implications**

Given the potential impact of the proposals a press release identifying the Council's disappointment at the announcement will be prepared and issued.

### **6.6 Local Government Review Implications**

There are no local Government Review implications identified in this report.

## **7.0 Corporate Implications**

### **7.1 Corporate Plan and Priorities**

Whilst Post Office services are outside of the Council's direct control, the Council Priority of pursuing "Quality Services for our people" should include using the Council's influence to ensure that the residents of the District have access to a full range of services, including those provided by the Post Office, some of which impact hugely on the quality of life enjoyed by the more vulnerable residents of the District.

### **7.2 Social Inclusion Implications**

The proposals will impact upon some of the more vulnerable residents of the District and as such this has been the basis of the District Council's representations made during the consultation period.

## **8.0 Recommendations**

- 8.1 The Committee is recommended to receive the report and note Post Office Ltd's decision to proceed with the closure of Post Office branches detailed above.

### **Background Papers**

1. Post Office Ltd. Network Change Programme Area Plan proposals for Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham.
2. Post Office Ltd. Network Change Programme Area Plan proposals for Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham - Appendix.
3. Report of the Executive Member for Social Inclusion and Culture to the District Council of Easington – 1 March 2007
4. Letter from Postwatch to Chief Executive dated 7<sup>th</sup> July 2008 entitled "Post Office Closure Programme – North East Plan 1, Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham.
5. Report of Scrutiny Support Manager to Community Services Scrutiny Committee - 15<sup>th</sup> July 2008.
6. Letter to Post Office Ltd as part of the local consultation exercise
7. Area Plan Decision booklet for Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham.