

Information / Discussion Paper

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 13 September 2004

Proposed closure of post offices in Cheltenham

This note contains information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee but where no decisions from Members are needed.

1. Why has this come to scrutiny

The council has recently received notification from the post office that they propose to close a number of post offices in the town. The chairman of this committee asked that the matter be put onto the agenda so that the council in its community leadership role can consider the issues before making a formal response.

2. Summary of the Issue

The post office has commenced its consultation on the proposed closure of six post office branches within the town. The proposals are made within the framework of the network reinvention programme, which aims to stabilise provision for the public by ensuring future viability of the urban network of branches. The proposed branch closures are:

- Montpellier
- Leckhampton
- Hales Road
- Hewlett Road
- Pittville
- Wymans Brook

The consultation period finishes on 27 September and if the branches are closed this is likely to happen from November onwards.

The post office will be looking for specific evidence as to why branches should not be closed and practical examples of the impact such closures will have.

3. Summary of evidence/information

- The post office has produced evidence to support their proposals and this is attached for each of the branches under review. It sets out a number of criteria which need to be considered such as access, walk routes, transport, decoration and facilities.
- The proposed closures undermine two of the council's corporate business plan priorities, which are "reducing the reliance on the private car" and "build strong healthy geographical communities", as well as the corporate action "to implement improvements that will build on the strength of the town".
- For the proposed closures for Leckhampton and Montpellier the walk route to the alternative branch will involve an incline. The evidence given by the post office suggests these are down hill gradients but clearly they become up hill gradients on the return journey.
- The council is trying to reduce the traffic within the town centre in line with the local transport plan but the evidence given by the post office indicates estimated driving

time to the alternative branch which in most cases is the main post office branch in the high street which will increase traffic.

- The main high street branch, which will be a receiving branch if the closures go ahead, is already very busy with queues at peak times. The evidence given by the post office suggests that additional staff hours be provided.
- The evidence given by the post office suggests that there is little retailing activity in the vicinity of the branches for Pittville and Hewlett Road. Both these areas are thriving urban communities providing services to local people including in both areas a pharmacy and a convenience store. Hewlett Road also has a national health dentist while in Pittville there is an active residents association.
- The post office suggests that Whaddon Road post office would provide a viable alternative in some cases. It is unlikely that current users will choose this option given the different communities. However it is indicated that the premises in Whaddon Road will be redecorated and additional staff employed. Any improvements to the Whaddon Road post office would be welcomed, as the area is one of the council's regeneration areas.
- The evidence given by the post office suggests that the housing in Montpelier is a mixture of terraced, semi detached and detached. This is incorrect as much of the housing in the Landsdown area tends to be flats, either purpose built or conversions.
- The proposals indicate that the services at the Bath Road premises will be upgraded to allow car licensing. This proposal should be welcomed as it will improve facilities on offer in the branch.
- Using census data it is evident that none of the proposed closures are in areas of multiple deprivation.
- From census data it is evident that one of the receiving post offices (High St) is in an area with a higher crime rate than other parts of the borough, although some of the proposed closures are also in higher than average crime areas.
- None of the proposed closures are in areas identified by the census as having high levels of health deprivation or areas with high numbers of people with long-term disabilities.
- Leckhampton post office is located in an area with a higher elderly population than other areas identified by the census.
- Regional spatial planning policy indicates that future growth should be in urban areas and therefore the post office need to be mindful of this in planning service provision.

4. Next Steps – possible next steps for the committee to consider e.g. potential witnesses, further report, site visit etc.

- Ward councillors will have more detailed knowledge of their area and will know the views of local residents and the committee may want to hear their views on the proposed closures.
- Maps showing the location of the post offices mapped against census data will be on display at the meeting for members to view.
- The consultation period ends on 27 September and this does not give the committee long if it wishes to undertake any additional activity on top of the discussion at this evenings meeting.
- Members need to consider the evidence presented to them and determine what response, if any, the council wishes to make to the consultation documents.
- Determine if there is any other action that the council could take.

Background papers

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