

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES

THE EARL BALDWIN SUITE, DUKE HOUSE, CLENSMORE STREET,
KIDDERMINSTER

6TH AUGUST 2008 (6:00 PM)

Present:

Councillors: Mrs H E Dyke (Chairman), J Phillips (Vice-Chairman), M Ahmed, J Baker, A J Buckley, G H Eeles, B T Glass, Mrs S M Hayward, C D Nicholls and G C Yarranton.

Observers:

Councillors: J-P Campion, M J Hart and Mrs A T Hingley.

CMS.20 Apologies for Absence:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis and Mrs P V Hayward.

CMS.21 Appointment of Substitutes:

Councillor M Ahmed was a substitute for Councillor Mrs P Hayward. Councillor B T Glass was a substitute for Councillor Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis.

CMS.22 Declarations of Interest:

No declarations of interest were made.

CMS.23 Minutes:

AGREED:

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd July 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CMS.24 Post Office Closures:

The Chairman welcomed the Senior External Relations Manager and the External Relations Manager from the Post Office Ltd. to the meeting.

The External Relations Manager provided Members with background information regarding the Network Change Programme. Members' attention was drawn to the following points:

- The Post Office Ltd. were losing £3.5 million each week, representing a loss of 4 million customers.
- Central Government provided £150 million worth of funding to the Post

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Office, this funding would continue until 2012.

- Consumers had changed the way in which they accessed services, for example many people now preferred to access services by internet or phone.
- Government agencies, who used the Post Office to deliver services, were looking to explore other means of providing services to their customers.
- From October 2006 to March 2007, the Government ran a national consultation on the future of Post Offices, this national consultation informed the closure plan and the decision was taken to close 2,500 Post Offices across the country.
- A plan was formulated on how Post Offices would be identified for closure, four key criteria were used:
 - Number of visitors,
 - Proximity to other Post Offices,
 - Ability of other Post Offices to take on additional business,
 - Loss to Post Office Ltd.
- Before each area plan was publicised, a team of managers examined the key issues in detail and reported back on findings. As a result of this process, there had been several changes to those Post Offices proposed for closure.
- On 27th August 2008 Wyre Forest District Council would receive notification from the Post Office Ltd. of those Post Offices within its area proposed for closure.
- The Post Office Ltd were committed to attending as many public meeting to discuss proposals as possible. They indicated that, where possible, they would appreciate it if a co-ordinated approach could be adopted when planning public meetings.
- All previous consultations could be viewed on the post offices website, www.postoffice.co.uk

The External Relations Manager clarified that the social and community role, adopted by some local Post Offices, would not be taken into consideration when identifying Post Offices for closure. Local retail opportunities, the impact on the local economy and local bus services would be a factor for consideration.

Members noted that the Post Office Ltd. was finding increasing difficulties in retaining Post Masters and that there were only 360 Post Offices nationally that were not run as a franchise.

In response to a question on whether the Post Office would be consulting on its preferred options or whether it would state the number of Post Offices to close in each area, the Senior External Relations Manager advised that Post Office Ltd. would state the Post Offices it had identified for closure and that this data would be contained in the Branch Access Report which Wyre Forest District Council would receive on 27th August 2008.

Further more, the Committee were advised that Government Agencies had

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withdrawn a large number of services from Post Offices, 90% of Post Office business was conducted on behalf of Government Agencies and recently this figure had reduced to 10%.

The External Relations Manager clarified that the Post Office Ltd had concentrated its consultation on County and District level Councils and that these authorities were relied upon to cascade information down to Parish level. However, once the consultation period began on 27th August 2008, representatives of the Post Office would be willing to attend Parish Council meetings, should they be available, to discuss proposals.

Councillor Hart left the meeting at this point (6:40pm)

A Parish Councillor presented concerns should Post Offices earmarked for closure be the last remaining shop in a village location.

The External Relations Manager clarified that whilst the 'last remaining shop' scenario was a factor that would be taken into consideration, it was not a single factor that could save a Post Office from closure. Should a Post Office be saved from closure, it would have to be based on a number of factors. She added that some Council's have provided further evidence regarding developments proposed for local areas that have influenced which Post Offices were proposed for closure.

Members noted that 500 outreach services were to be set up across the country and that there were three variations on this service:

- i) A travelling Post Office situated within a van operated by the sub postmaster that would visit small communities at set times and days each week, to deliver core Post Office products and services to customers.
- ii) A fixed site Post Office branch from which the sub postmaster would transact core Post Office products and services during restricted hours each week. The premises would be owned by a third party, for example, a shop or community centre.
- iii) A partner service where reduced Post Offices products would be sold.

A Member asked if the Post Office was planning to close those Post Offices that would generate the most money. The External Relations Manager clarified that the Post Office Ltd did not have the option of doing nothing as the vast amount of Post Offices across the country did not make a profit. However, some Post Offices that made considerable losses, would remain open due to their lack of proximity to other services.

The Committee noted that on average 18% of Post Offices would close and that the House of Commons had received a report from a Select Committee that had looked at matters relating to Post Office Finance.

The External Relations Manager advised that the outcome of this Select Committee was that greater clarity had been requested into the relationship between the Post Office and the Royal Mail.

Members queried if local Councils could subsidise local Post Offices. The Senior

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External Relations Manager clarified that this option had been requested by other Local Authorities and gave Essex as an example of pursuing this option which was being termed as 'local funding'.

Furthermore, Members were advised that the Post Office were willing to discuss with any group, the implications and costings for this option, but as discussions progressed, interested parties would be requested to sign a disclosure to ensure the confidentiality of financial details.

Members noted that around 100 expressions of interest had been received for this option and that around 50 of these had progressed to signing the disclosure.

The Economic Development & Tourism Manager advised Members that Worcestershire County Council were planning to hold an event for Members on 4th September 2008 at 2pm, following the announcement of proposed Post Office closures on 27th August 2008.

Agreed:

Members noted the information and that further details on Post Offices proposed for closure would be made available on 27th August 2008.

CMS.25 Recommendations from the Driving Standards Agency Review Panel

Members considered a briefing paper from the Assistant Scrutiny / Committee Officer and the Regeneration & Economic Prosperity Manager which was presented by the Chairman of the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) Review Panel, Councillor Phillips.

Members noted the inconsistencies in the DSA's approach to the location of driving test centres and the implementation of its travel criteria and felt that in only investigating one alternative site to the Castle Road test centre the DSA had not seriously considered alternative accommodations.

The Committee expressed thanks to the Regeneration & Economic Prosperity Manager and the Assistant Scrutiny / Committee Officer for the work they had conducted for the review.

Recommended to Cabinet:

- 1. The Driving Standards Agency be requested to reconsider its decision to remove a test centre facility from the District.**
- 2. Subject to the Driving Standards Agency's willingness to reinstate a facility in the District, the Council assist the Driving Standards Agency in identifying potential sites for consideration.**
- 3. The Local Member of Parliament be requested to put the following Parliamentary question forward:**

CMS.26 Alcohol & Substance Misuse Review Panel

The Chairman advised Members that this item was as a result of a motion to Council

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on 16th July 2008, an amendment to the motion was then put forward which was agreed by Council.

Discussion took place on the co-opted members and expert witnesses that would be called to inform the review process.

Agreed:

- 1. The Scoping form be agreed.**
- 2. The District Chief Inspector of West Mercia Police be invited to participate in the review as a co-opted member of the review panel.**
- 3. The following Members volunteered to participate in the review:
Councillors: Mrs H E Dyke, J Phillips, Mrs S Hayward, J Baker, G C Yarranton and A Buckley.**
- 4. The first meeting of the review panel take place on Wednesday 20th August 2008 at 4pm.**
- 5. The second meeting of the review panel take place on Wednesday 24th September 2008 at 6pm.**

CMS.27 Work Programme

The Panel considered its work programme for the current municipal year with regard to the Community Strategy, Corporate Plan, Annual Priorities and the Forward Plan.

The Chairman advised Members that the Citizens Advice Bureau had held its first meeting, a further two meetings were planned for August 2008.

Members noted that it had been requested that an item on flooding be presented to the September meeting of this committee.

AGREED:

The work programme for the current municipal year be approved subject to:

- 1. The Alcohol and Substance Misuse Review Panel being added to the work programme.**
- 2. The item on flooding being added to the work programme for September 2008.**

The meeting ended at 7:45pm.

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