

Age Concern Northwest Cumbria Stamped out? Campaign – local survey

No of participants: 232

Allerdale: 39%
Copeland: 61%

A. Usage of post offices

59% visit post office at least once a week
15% visit each day
12% visit at least once a month

NB 15% of respondents do not visit post office. Most of these have family or carers who go for them.

B. Main services which people use:

Postal services (60%)
Paying bills (56%)
Collecting pensions/benefits: 53%
Groceries, household goods, cards, newspapers sold in post office: 33%
Information: 31%
NB 18% use post office to access cash, 5% for banking

C. Bank accounts

13% of respondents (26) did not have a bank account.

41% were unaware that they might be able to access their bank account through the post office.

D. 98% of respondents feel that the post office plays an important social role in their community, and that it is a 'life-line'.

It is very important to them as a place to meet other people, to have a chat and to get information about what is going on in the community.

For many, particularly those who live alone, it is the only place where they will see anyone during the day and their only opportunity to socialise. Comments included:

- *"It means everything to us who are housebound, even if it is once a week"*
- *"When you live alone, meeting people in the post office is important"*
- *"It is so handy to meet others, especially those who can only walk a short distance"*
- *"It keeps me in contact with the community"*

- *“Our post office has closedyou miss contact with other pensioners especially when you cannot get out often”*

Older people value the post-office as somewhere they can get information:

- *The post office offers an information service, both formal and informal... The people who run it are very involved in the community. I would be a much poorer place without them.”*
- *“They are a mine of information on a lot of subjects”*
- *“If it were to close, we would have nowhere to go for information.”*

They also value the help they receive from their local post-office staff:

- *“I would be lost without them. They sort out all my bills and pension”.*
- *“I would like the post-office where it is because people of different ages are getting really confused by all the paper work everyone is getting at this time.”*

The village post office is of great importance to those with limited mobility, the disabled and those with no transport:-

- *“We are both disabled and to both of us it is a life-line”*
- *“Many individuals with mobility problems use their local post office to pay bills and buy their groceries and withdraw cash. It is often a necessary part of their weekly routine”.*
- *“Elderly people without transport and poor mobility would find it difficult to rely on public transport”.*
- *“I have no transport. The post office is within walking distance.”*
- *“For people who are not able to travel it is a life-line.”*
- *“It is a valuable asset for local areas. Disabled and elderly can access without needing taxi etc. These vulnerable people cannot access public transport to get to banks.”*

E. Which services would older people miss most if their post-offices were to close?

49% said they would miss postal services most

39% said collecting pensions/benefits

13% said access to cash

11% said paying bills

8% said groceries, household goods etc

18% said all services provided at the moment

F. When asked what travel arrangements they would have to make if their post office closed:

The highest number (**30%**) said taxi (NB poor public transport in this rural area).

27% said bus, 11% car and 9% felt they would have difficulty making any arrangements, eg because of their health.

G. When asked to consider possible options, if rural post-offices were to close:

Most respondents (44%) favoured a hosted service, where an employee from a nearby post office travels to provide a full post office service in premises situated in the community. 79% thought this should be in a shop, 42% in a community centre, 19% in a village hall. Other possible venues included a petrol station, pub or police station.

24% favoured a partner service, eg with a local business or shop, providing a basic post office service.

23% favoured a mobile service delivering a full postal service to a number of communities by a walk-in vehicle.

11% favoured a home service where postal products ordered by telephone are delivered to the home or to a community meeting point.

H. When asked to give other comments on the effects of the closure of rural post offices, respondents expressed their concerns about the wider effects on their communities

- *“There is very little communication with most of the village already, it would be a great shame to do without the post office as well.”*
- *“It is important for the community that the post office remains as a local service provided.”*
- *“Close this post office and the people here would eventually leave and the village as such would die. Nobody would want to live here anymore.”*
- *“The facilities of A...post office are vital to the health and well-being of the village”.*
- *“Do not close the post offices. They provide an important service to the community as a whole.”*