

postwatch

OSC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & ENTERPRISE

16/170508

ITEM 3 APP E

Liam Murphy
Chief Executive
Copeland Borough Council
The Copeland Centre
The Council Offices
Catherine Street
WHITEHAVEN
CA28 7SJ

26 March 2008

COPELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
28 MAR 2008
PASSED TO: *Leann*
ACKNOWLEDGED: *Neil White*

Dear Mr Murphy

Post Office Closure Programme – North West Plan 3 Cumbria

Post Office Ltd's six week public consultation on post office closures in Cumbria commenced on 18 March 2008. Post Office Ltd has proposed the closure of 35 branches in this area, with a further 10 branches to be replaced by outreach services. A total of 216 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

Barrow and Furness
Carlisle Boro
Copeland
Penrith and the Border Co
Westmorland and Lonsdale
Workington

MP

John Hutton
Eric Martlew
Jamie Reed
David Maclean
Tim Farron
Tony Cunningham

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

The Consumer Council for Postal Services

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 a couple of aspects of their proposals that we are concerned about. Specifically:

- the proposed closure of Botcherby PO in Carlisle which serves a distinct community on the edge of the town
- the possible loss of last remaining shops in some of the villages identified for closure of their post office

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.

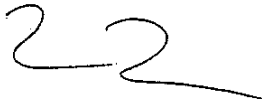
We hope you will be able to give your views on the proposals to Post Office Ltd. This can be done by writing to **National Consultation Team, Post Office Ltd, FREEPOST CONSULTATION TEAM**, or emailing consultation@postoffice.co.uk.

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