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Post Office Network Change Consultation

The Chief Executive Group of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight (HIOW) Association of Local Authorities has considered the proposals outlined in the Network Change proposals for the area. Many if not all the authorities in the County may well have responded to your consultation citing individual issues. However, the Group felt that such was the significance of the issue across the whole of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight that we ought to respond with a collective overview, and to reiterate common concerns.

The HIOW authorities are concerned that the changes could have a significant impact on the most vulnerable groups in our communities. The rural towns and villages are already affected by the reducing public transport network and the social deprivation indices in ostensibly prosperous counties reflect the local access difficulties experienced by many residents. Similarly, a number of our urban communities lack comprehensive facilities. In both instances this can mean a local Post Office is an integral part of a community, and any closure proposals have the potential to exacerbate these very real problems.

In many places throughout the HIOW area, the minimum access standards outlined by the DTI in its concluding report will in reality be inadequate and it is essential that the Post Office recognises the need to improve on those standards by taking account of local needs. Many of our settlements already fail the proposed access standards for urban and rural communities before any rationalisation process is considered. I have attached a map of my own authority's post office provision by way of example. To overcome the current difficulties we would suggest that the proposed standard for Hampshire be halved ie 95% of the urban and rural populations should be within a half and one and a half miles of their nearest post office respectively.

As well as the impact on existing communities, the County, Cities and Island are facing significant pressures for growth. The recently published Inspectors Report on the draft South East Plan will add to this pressure. Significant new development is planned throughout the County with a particular emphasis in the Urban South Hampshire area. By way of illustration I

attach a map indicating large housing sites currently planned in Hampshire and a plan of proposed growth to 2026 in urban South Hampshire.

In summary, the likely rate of house-building across our sub-region will see an increase of some 6,935 new homes a year to 2026, distributed as follows:

North Hants	1,370 new homes per annum
Central Hants	1,045 new homes per annum
South Hants	4,000 new homes per annum
Isle of Wight	520 new homes per annum

Again, the need for the Post Office to take account of these proposals is vital to ensure that any changes reflect the growth and extra demands that these new communities will generate.

Can I finally express my concern on behalf of the Chief Executive Group that the lack of detail on proposals that has so far been produced, makes for a very unsatisfactory consultation process. If the public consultation that is due to commence in Hampshire in October is only to consider the post office replacement arrangements rather than any closure proposals themselves, then this compounds the general sense of dissatisfaction and I urge you to reconsider your position.

The HIOW authorities are anxious to work with the Post Office to help plan the future network for our area. We recognise the pressures you face in meeting financial and performance targets, and would be willing to explore new partnership approaches to maintaining these vital services in our communities.

Simon Eden
Chief Executive