

# The Post Office Network

## The Post Office network and CAB clients

Ninety seven per cent of CAB advisers think that vulnerable people in the community will suffer if their local Post Office closes

The Post Office network provides products and services to 28 million customers each week, through 14,376 branches located throughout the UK. However, losses have risen to such levels in recent years that the Government believes the network is unsustainable in its present form<sup>1</sup>, and the Department of Trade and Industry recently consulted on its future.

The Post Office network plays a number of incredibly important roles for CAB clients, many of whom are among the most vulnerable members of society. Two recent surveys – one completed by CAB advisers and one completed online by members of the public visiting the CAB service's Adviceguide website - have revealed what people value about their local Post Office and the potential impact of branch closures<sup>2</sup>:

- Closures will hit vulnerable groups hard – 97% of CAB advisers consider that vulnerable people in their community would suffer if their local Post Office were to close
- Members of the public also have strong feelings about Post Office closures – 91% of respondents to the Adviceguide survey said they would personally be significantly affected or quite affected if the branch they use most often were to close
- As well as having an impact on individuals, closures would have a significant effect on wider communities – 95% of people responding to the Adviceguide survey said their community would be affected or significantly affected by closure of the local branch.

<sup>1</sup> The post office network: A consultation document, DTI, December 2006.

<sup>2</sup> The Adviser Survey was completed by advisers working for Citizens Advice Scotland and Citizens Advice England & Wales. The Adviceguide Survey was completed by members of the public living in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

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## Current usage of Post Offices

- Thirty nine per cent of people visit the Post Office several times a week or more. This figure rises amongst certain vulnerable groups, such as those aged over 65 (50%) and those in receipt of means-tested benefits (46%)
- Eighty five per cent of people value the convenient location of Post Offices, which is seen to grant an important measure of independence to vulnerable groups such as elderly people and those with mobility problems. Helpful counter staff (73%), the range of product and services (64%) and the trustworthy name (63%) are also highly valued
- Fifty nine per cent of people feel that the Post Office acts as a centre of the community, rising to 74% of people living in rural communities.

## The impact of Post Office closures

- The closure of the local Post Office would have a significant impact on the time it takes people to get to their closest branch, the way they travel there and the costs involved in doing so. These increased travel distances and costs would render the journey impossible for some vulnerable client groups
  - At present, 85% of people can get to their local Post Office within 10 minutes. Closure would mean that travel times would increase to over half an hour for 25% of UK respondents and 36% of Scottish respondents
  - Seventy four per cent of people currently walk to the Post Office - closure of the local office would mean that only 14% of UK respondents and 7% of Scottish respondents would still be able to walk
  - Fifty nine per cent of Scottish respondents said it would cost them more to travel to another branch, compared with 49% of UK respondents
- Closure would also have a wider social and economic impact on the community. Seventy five per cent of CAB advisers feel that it would result in a reduction of customers for nearby businesses, with 56% feeling it might even lead to their closure.

## CAS proposals

- The Post Office network closure programme must take account of community and social need, not just commercial considerations
- Decisions over potential closures must include meaningful consultation with local communities, including hard to reach groups
- If it is decided that some closures are unavoidable, the government's access criteria must include a range of factors such as public transport and alternative access to basic services
- Outreach services must meet customers' needs in terms of hours, locations and services and be well established before the branch they are replacing closes.

**|| Many elderly clients use the Post Office as a one-stop shop to collect benefits, pay utility bills, obtain stamps etc. Clients feel safer collecting money and paying bills in one venue, than carrying their money from place to place to pay accounts. This is particularly the case with the elderly and/or disabled – West of Scotland CAB**

## Case evidence

**|| Rural bus services are poor and that is the only travel available for disadvantaged people to get to services which aren't local – East of Scotland CAB**

**|| I would have to pay £3.30...to get to the nearest Post Office. I am currently on benefits and that is a substantial sum of money to me - Adviceguide Survey response**

**|| A centre of the village community especially for elderly people who do not have easy access to banks and city centres. They are invaluable – Adviceguide Survey response**

**|| Many people are unable to open even a basic bank account because of their credit rating...and rely on the Post Office to get their benefits – East of Scotland CAB**

**|| In this area, if we lose the Post Office, we will lose the grocery shop along with it – Adviceguide Survey response**

**|| A Post Office should be a service to the community and should not be judged only on its ability to be profitable or not – East of Scotland CAB**