

Swale Rural Forum - 12th January 2010

1. Provision of mobile post office service

Response to Councillor Ben Stokes from the Field Change Advisor - South East England, Post Office Limited:

I have now had a chance to review the points you raised in your letter dated 20th October 2009 where you were asking for a mobile 'outreach' Post Office service to be established in the rural areas of Swale Borough Council in Kent.

In reaching the decision on the number of Post Office branches that should close under the Network Change Programme, the Government balanced the social needs of the network with the cost to the taxpayer of continuing to fund a national network.

No Outreach facilities were established under the Kent Area Plan as the area met the minimum access criteria laid down by Government and communities had alternative access to Post Office services. Whilst I acknowledge that approximately 500 new Outreach Service Points were introduced as part of the Network Change Programme, a balance does need to be made between ensuring the network remains accessible to our customers, against the heavy cost to the public purse.

As an organisation, Post Office Limited has faced, and continues to face, considerable challenges. Customer usage of Post Office branches has continued to fall in line with national trends as both our clients and customers have switched to alternative channels such as the internet. Whilst the Network Change Programme has placed our agents on a much stronger footing to respond to changes within the market place, it is very important for the viability of our remaining network that the core business migrates from closing branches to those branches remaining in the network. If business does not migrate, then the profitability and viability of other branches may be put at risk, particularly in the current economic climate.

I am therefore sorry, but we will be unable to provide mobile services to previously closed down branches.

2. Provision of mobile medical services

Response from the Head of Primary and Community Care (NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent):

I assume that when you mention a mobile surgery you are referring to the new GP Lead Health Centre which opened earlier in 2009. This type of service is new to NHS Eastern and Coastal and it is too early at this stage to suggest this type of service should be extended to other parts of the PCT.

The service that is available is open 7 days a week, 8.00 am till 8.00 pm supporting patients registered and not registered with a GP. In addition to this service, over 70% of all our GP practices have now agreed to extend their opening times, so many are now open early in the morning or later in the evening or Saturday mornings.

We hope that the combination of these initiatives will help improve primary care services for local people.

Once the GP Lead Health Centre has been in place for at least a year, an evaluation of this service will take place.

3. Enforcement Action on sites that have not yet been developed

After inspection of a site, a Section 215 Notice can be served which will require the site to be improved.

Enforcement Team Manager