



**Haringey Council**

<b>Briefing for:</b>	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
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<b>Title:</b>	Post Office Closures follow up
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<b>Purpose of briefing:</b>	To provide: (1) feedback from local Area Assemblies on post office closures (2) details of the impact of post office closure on a local sub-postmaster (via Cllr Winskill) (3) pictorial evidence of local sub-post offices.(via Cllr Bevan).
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<b>Date:</b>	June 24 <sup>th</sup> 2010
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### 1. Introduction

Six post offices were closed in Haringey in 2008 as part of the Network Change Programme. A brief survey was designed to provide an illustration of local resident opinions on the closure of these post offices. Surveys were distributed to Area Assembly areas in which post office closures took place. Not all Area Assembly's could participate as meetings were scheduled after Overview & Scrutiny meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> July.

### 2. Returned surveys

In total, 36 returned surveys were completed and returned from attendees at Area Assemblies. Returns from Area Assemblies were as set out in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Area Assembly	Survey Returns
St Ann's & Harringay	16
West Green & Bruce Grove	18
Wood Green	2
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><u>36</u></b>

### 3. Use of local post office services.

A majority (89%) of respondents to this survey were regular users of local post office services (Figure 2).

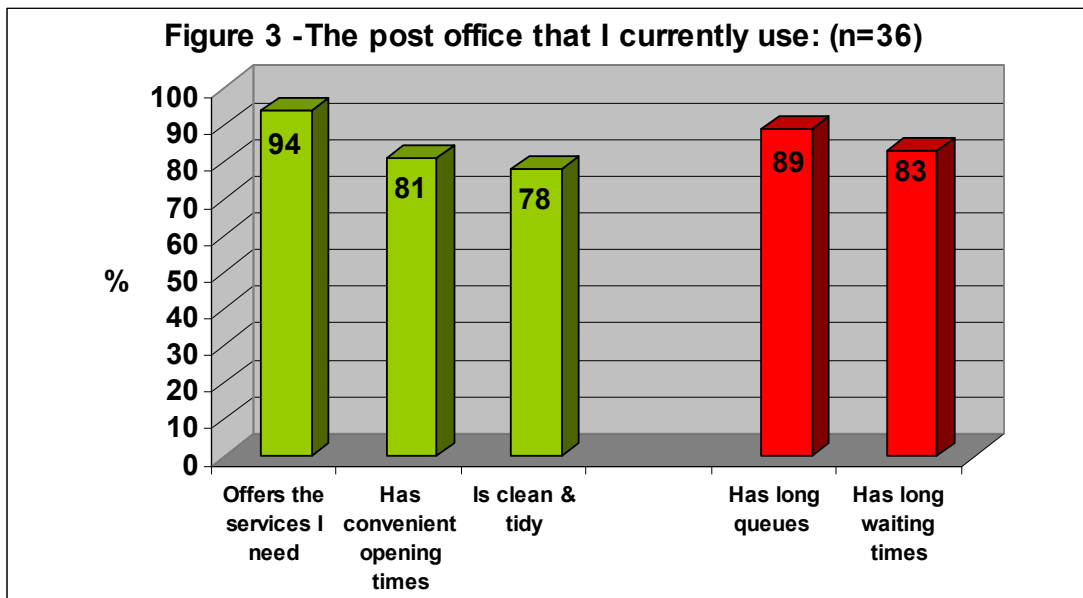
Figure 2

Regular user of post office?	Survey Returns
Yes	32 (89%)
No	4 (11%)

#### 4. Assessment of local post offices

Respondents were asked to assess the local post office which they used from a range of preset options. Analysis of these responses would suggest that respondents were broadly satisfied that their local post office offers the services they needed (94%), was open at convenient times (81%) and was clean and tidy (78%) (Figure 3).

A clear majority of respondents however, also indicated that there was always a long queue at their local post office (89%) and that you had to wait a long time to be served (83%) (Figure 3).



Respondents were also invited to provide qualitative comments to support their responses. Analysis of these responses would appear to verify that respondents experience long queues at local post offices and that there were issues with the cleanliness and tidiness of a number of local post offices:

*'The Broad Lane Post office is a public disgrace: the service is slow and the staffs are surly and unhelpful. Collecting packages and signed for letters is a pain because often the items are not there even after 48 hours. The shop is untidy and cluttered and queues spill out on to the street... .'* (Attendee at St Ann's Area Assembly)

*'There are long queues at the High Road office.'* (Attendee at West Green & Bruce Grove Area Assembly)

*'The post office at Wood Green is good but the queues are very long... .'* (Attendee at West Green & Bruce Grove Area Assembly)

*'There are long wait even for simple postings. It always seems to be short staffed. There never seems to be anyone on the money exchange counter*

*and the stamp machine is empty. (Attendee at St Ann's & Haringay Area Assembly)*

There was also a concern that where local post offices are offering a sub-standard service, there is little being done to improve services:

*'Bruce Grove post office is a disgrace; it is filthy and cramped and an insult as a public service and to the local people that use it. I believe it's a franchise and I think Post Office Ltd should hold the franchise firmly to account to demand improvements and exact penalties. (Attendee at St Ann's & Haringay Area Assembly)*

## 5. Impact of local post office closures

Although most respondents were users of local post office services (Figure 2), a much smaller proportion (44%) indicated that they had been directly affected by the post office closure programme (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Affected by post office closures?	Survey Returns
Yes	16 (44%)
No	20 (56%)

### Post office as a valued local service

At the outset, it should be emphasised that where residents do use a post office local to them it clearly provides a vital public service which is valuable to the communities they serve:

*'My local post office is a major information point of my life as well as other services that it operates.' (Attendee at West Green & Bruce Grove Area Assembly)*

*'I would not like to see my post office go as it's extremely useful to me.' (Attendee at St Ann's & Haringay Area Assembly)*

*I am delighted our post office is open, the service is great. I feel sorry for all those who lost their local post office as the other big post offices are impersonal and the queues are very long and it is so tiring standing. (Attendee at West Green & Bruce Grove Area Assembly)*

### Difficulty in accessing alternative services

Analysis of qualitative responses provided by respondents would suggest that local residents were affected by post office closures in a number of ways.

Analysis of these responses indicate that many post office users now have to travel further to be able to access post office services. For particular groups of services users who may have mobility problems or who have difficulty travelling, such as the elderly or those with small children, this can be problematic:

*'I now have to travel a long way for my nearest [post office]... I am a pensioner with restricted mobility. A post office which is nearer is less stressful.' (Attendee at West Green & Bruce Grove Area Assembly)*

*I have been affected badly, now two small children and I have to walk 20 minutes there and back to the post office or pack them both in the car and drive. It's ridiculous. It's too far - my old post office in Weston Park was what I would call local... .' (Attendee at St Ann's & Harringay Area Assembly)*

*I have two children and now have to go to the Broadway to use the post office this is very inconvenient and not a good service for customers who are time poor. (Attendee at St Ann's & Harringay Area Assembly)*

*'The post office at the corner of Stapleton Road/ Ferme Park Road was a well used facility and a link for the local community. There are a lot of elderly residents who used the post office regularly who find it difficult to go further a field.'* (Attendee at St Ann's & Harringay Area Assembly)

#### Alternative branches are busier with longer queues

Coupled with longer journeys, respondents would also appear to experience long queues and possible delays at alternative post office services:

*'I find it quite difficult to get to either Crouch End or Stroud Green and the queues there are always very long.'* (Attendee at St Ann's & Harringay Area Assembly)

*'I now have a long walk to Broad Lane where the queues are always long so even simple tasks waste a lot of time.'* (Attendee at West Green & Bruce Grove Area Assembly)

*'I send hundreds of items every week and now Weston Park has closed I have to drive sacks of mail, then park and carry them to the post office in Crouch End and then queue for ages. The queues are too long plus now I have to drive [which is not good for the planet].'* (Attendee at St Ann's & Harringay Area Assembly)

*'I have a longer walk to the post office and there are longer queues. The staff seem overworked but friendly.'* (Attendee at St Ann's & Harringay Area Assembly)

#### **6. Impact of post office closure on sub-postmaster**

Cllr Winskill met with a local ex-sub-postmaster whose post office was closed in the 2008 closure programme. The following are notes of a conversation with the sub-postmaster to examine the effects of this closure on his business.

- The PO was based in the rear of the newsagents in a double parade of a dozen shops.
- There has been a Post Office on the site for at least 56 years and one on the parade since it was built in late Victorian times.
- One of the immediate effects of the closure was the loss of two staff – a part timer and a full timer. They had been paid for out of the salary from the Post Office: the removal of this meant that their wages could no longer be afforded.

- Since the closure, the sub-postmaster reported that he has lost 25% of his non-Post Office turnover.
- He estimates that 8 out of 10 of his Post Office customers would have bought something else from the shop.
- Trade has been diverted to the Crouch End crown Post Office and with it much of the non PO purchases.
- This is likely to have been experienced by other shops in the area (the grocery shop at No 96 has compensated for this by acquiring a “Pay Pall” facility, attracting customers wishing to pay utility bills electronically.)
- As other overheads on the business remained the same, the unit profit has declined.
- An application to LB of Haringey for a business rate review was unsuccessful.
- The proprietor is keenly aware of the inconvenience this has caused to less able and older people, especially residents of the nearby [care home]. He continues to deliver small items they request by telephone.
- When the closure happened, the PO came to paint out their logo on his fascia board. A new one would cost @ £2 500; not really affordable to a small business.
- Overall the closure has meant that the value of his business has diminished and that the proprietor and his family are contemplating selling.

#### **7. Physical appearance and maintenance of sub-post offices**

Cllr Bevan has supplied pictorial evidence (below) of the frontage of two local sub post offices at Broad Lane, Page Green N15 and 105 Turnpike Lane, N8).

It is felt that the frontage of the two sub post offices represent a lack of professional standards by Post office Ltd in the image it aims to present to customers. This is of particular concern when compared with local banks and building societies with whom Post Office Ltd is increasingly in competition with for business.