

Branch change

Mike Williams
Area Liaison Officer
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Council House
Priory Road
DUDLEY
DY1 1HF

Dudley Council

27 OCT 2006

Directorate of Finance
ICT & Procurement

26 October 2006

Dear Mr Williams

Post Office® Halesowen branch
7 Queensway, Halesowen, West Midlands, B63 4AA

Thank you for your recent letter addressed to Mr Nick Gittens, Network Service Manager, concerning our plans to franchise the above Post Office branch. As a member of the National Consultation Team I have been asked to reply.

I think it is important to stress that our franchise partners are making a significant investment when taking on a Post Office franchise. Dheils Ltd will be keen, therefore, to make sure that the service offer they provide continues to meet customer needs so that they are able to retain existing Post Office customers and also attract new ones to grow their business.

Please be assured that we would not have submitted our plans for Halesowen Post Office branch into the public domain unless we were fully satisfied that the premises were able to accommodate the Post Office branch. Indeed, as explained in our consultation material, the new branch will be carefully integrated into their store, and will remain fully accessible for customers. There will be flat level access into the premises through wide entrance doors.

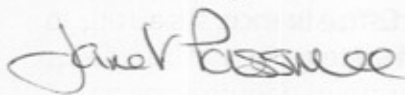
Your comments about the photobooth and stamp vending machines have been noted. It maybe helpful to know that there is a store virtually opposite the new site from where passport-sized photos are available. I can also confirm that in addition to the Post Office counter, books of stamps will be available in the tills located within the retail area.

I can also advise that our partner plans to incorporate a private consultancy area within the branch, where customers can discuss financial service products. This area will be comfortably furnished and will have broadband access facilities.

Finally, with regard to your comments about the new location of Halesowen branch, we understand that some customers will find visiting a different location inconvenient - and we do regret this - but we do everything that we can to take into account the impact of the changes on our customers when formulating our plans. Before our plans are submitted into the public domain a Post Office Ltd manager visits the area personally to walk between alternative branches, survey the terrain, measure the distances, and get information about local public transport facilities. We pay particular attention to the needs of the less able, the elderly, those without cars, and those with pushchairs. When looking at service provision in the area, we are mindful of the needs of all our customers. Nevertheless, while we do all that we can to make it easier for our customers to do business with us, Post Office Ltd do not have any control over facilities provided by other organisations.

In closing I would like to thank you for your interest in this matter. Please be reassured that the purpose of this consultation is to seek valuable feedback from both customers and community representatives alike on the service implications of the planned change. At the end of the consultation period all such feedback received on any service related issues will be taken into account when finalising our plans for future service provision in Halesowen. Once that decision is confirmed, it will be communicated to customers and local representatives alike.

Yours sincerely



Janet Passmore (Mrs)
Consultation Support
National Consultation Team
PO Box 2060,
WATFORD
WD18 8ZW
Website: www.postoffice.co.uk
Customer Helpline: 08457 22 33 44

The Post Office[®] is able to supply customers with this information, free of charge, in an alternative format for people who are visually impaired. To obtain a copy, call the Post Office[®] helpline on 08457 22 33 44 or textphone 08457 22 33 55.

Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement

Council House, Priory Road, Dudley, West Midlands. DY1 1HF

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www.dudley.gov.uk

Dudley
Metropolitan Borough Council

Your ref:

Our ref:

MSW/klp/3301 Please ask for:

Mike Williams

Ext: 4800

E-mail:

mike.s.williams@dudley.gov.uk

Direct Dial (01384) 814800

20th October 2006

Dear Mr Gittens

Re: Post Office - Halesowen Branch, 7 Queensway Halesowen

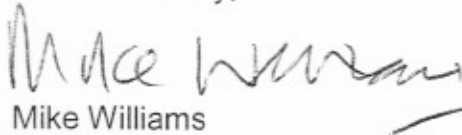
I refer to your letter which was received in the Council on 19th September. I am writing specifically on behalf of the Halesowen Area Committee to respond to your proposals to move the Post Office provision from Queensway to new premises at 8 Peckingham Street.

The existing Post Office at 7 Queensway is very well used and often experiences lengthy queues. Whilst your letter suggests that the proposed new arrangements will continue to provide the standards of service and range of products currently available, there would, I am sure, be a general expectation from the people of Halesowen that any changes of this nature should lead to an improved service and a greater product range. In that context, we are disappointed that the photo booth and stamp vending machines will not be made available.

The proposed new premises in Peckingham Street are further from the bus station than Queensway and car parks are generally less convenient.

I have sent a copy of this letter to Postwatch.

Yours sincerely,



Mike Williams

Area Liaison Officer

Mr N Gittens
Network Service Manager
Post Office Ltd, c/o National Consultation Team
PO Box 2060
Watford
WD18 8ZW

Directorate of Law and Property

Legal and Democratic Services, Council House, Priory Road, Dudley, West Midlands. DY1 1HF
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Minicom Number for the Hearing Impaired (01384) 815273
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Our Ref
210906/MJ

Please ask for
Mrs Manjit Johal

Direct Dial
01384 815267

email: manjit.johal@dudley.gov.uk

21st September 2006

Dear Member

Re: Post Office Queensway, Halesowen – Proposed Branch Change

Please find attached a copy of a letter and information that I have recently received concerning proposals to change the Halesowen Branch from Queensway to Peckingham Street and also details on changes in management.

I would appreciate it if you could send any comments or feedback that you may have direct to Mike Williams (Area Liaison Officer) or to myself by 16th October 2006 to enable a collated response to be submitted by the due date, 31st October, 2006.

Yours sincerely

Manjit Johal
Democratic Services Officer

Distribution:-

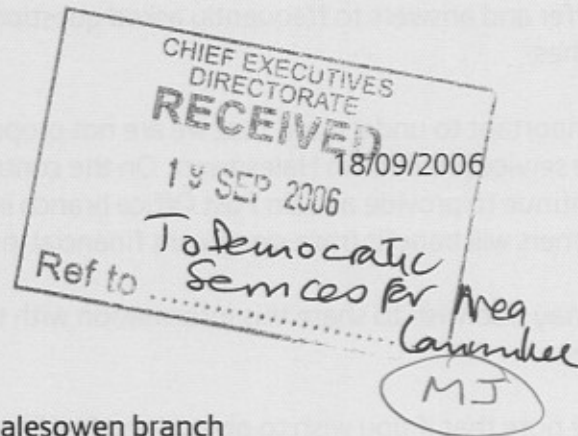
Councillors Body, Burston, Crumpton, Mrs Dunn, Mrs Faulkner, Hill, Jackson, James, Ms Nicholls, Ms Partridge, Mrs Shakespeare, Taylor, K Turner, Mrs Turner and J Woodall

cc Mike Williams (Area Liaison Officer)



Branch change

Andrew Sparke, Chief Executive
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
The Council House
Priory Road
DUDLEY
DY1 1HF



Dear Mr Sparke

Post Office® Halesowen branch
7 Queensway, Halesowen, West Midlands, B63 4AA

As part of the continuing review of our directly managed branch network, I am writing to let you know of our intention to change the way we manage Halesowen Post Office branch currently located at the above address.

Currently, Post Office Ltd own and manage the above Post Office branch. Our intention is to enter into an agreement with Dheils Ltd, who will manage Halesowen Post Office branch on behalf of Post Office Ltd from new premises at 8 Peckingham Street, Halesowen, B63 3BP, 200 yards away from our current site in Halesowen. In partnership, we will continue to provide the high standard of service and range of products currently available at Halesowen Post Office branch. The new branch will be integrated into a convenience store, and fully accessible for customers, with flat, level access and wide entrance doors.

Although Dheils Ltd is a newly registered company, the operational management team have run a very successful business for the past 4 years. We are confident, therefore, that they have the appropriate knowledge and experience of retail operations to enable them to continue to provide a high standard of service to our customers at Halesowen Post Office branch.

We have agreed a Code of Practice on how we deal with a range of branch network change with Postwatch, our independent consumer council. As part of that Code of Practice, Postwatch recognised that the decision to transfer a Post Office branch to a franchise partner is a commercial decision to be taken solely by Post Office Ltd and is, therefore, not subject to public debate or consent. However, it is important to us that our customers and local community representatives like yourself, understand the rationale behind our decision and that you also have the opportunity to comment on the facilities which will be available at the new branch.

In view of this, we are inviting feedback from yourself and from customers who regularly visit the branch, on the following areas;

- (i) the proposed opening hours at the new branch;
- (ii) access arrangements into the new branch;
- (iii) the facilities that are planned for the new branch.

Enclosed with this letter is a summary of what the newly franchised Halesowen Post Office branch will offer and answers to frequently asked questions about why Post Office Ltd franchises branches.

It is important to understand that we are not proposing the removal or downgrading of the Post Office service provided in Halesowen. On the contrary, our partnership with Dheils Ltd will help us to continue to provide a main Post Office branch in the town for the long-term. As you can see, customers will benefit from significant financial investment from Dheils Ltd.

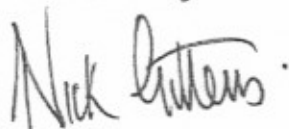
You may also wish to share this information with those you believe may have an interest in this matter.

Please note that if you wish to give us any feedback on the facilities at the new branch, please ensure that we receive this by close of business on 31st October 2006. I will write again, after this date, to update you on any comments we have received on our plans, and to confirm the arrangements we have made for Halesowen Post Office branch.

Among other local interest groups, we are also contacting the consumer council, Postwatch, and you may wish to consider copying your response to them at the following address; Postwatch, 22 Grosvenor Gardens, London, SW1W 0TT. You are under no obligation to do so and any correspondence sent to us will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain our position.

Yours sincerely



Nick Gittens
Network Service Manager
Post Office Ltd, c/o National Consultation Team
PO Box 2060, WATFORD WD18 8ZW

Telephone: 0191 512 7427 Email via our website: www.postoffice.co.uk

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Current Halesowen Post Office® branch located at;

7 Queensway
Halesowen
B63 4AA

Franchise partner;

Dheils Ltd

New Halesowen Post Office® branch, located at;

8 Peckingham Street
Halesowen
B63 3BP

Distance from current site;

200 yards along gently varied terrain

What will the new Halesowen Post Office® branch offer?

- Extended opening hours as follows;

Mon	08.30-17.30
Tues	09.00-17.30
Weds – Sat	08.30-17.30

- The same wide range of main Post Office services currently available at Halesowen Post Office branch including; personal banking; financial services; car tax renewal; Post Office card account; passport application checking and foreign currency services, but with the exception of the photo booth and stamp vending machines.
- The new branch will have 5 serving positions in total. These will be a mixture of traditional and open plan style, and will include a designated Bureau de Change/Giro business banking position that has the flexibility to be utilised for all other Post Office transactions, during busy periods.
- There will be level access, via double entrance doors, improving access to Post Offices services for customers with disabilities. Dheils Ltd is keen to ensure there is continued good access to Post Office services and the new Post Office counter area itself will be carefully integrated into the premises, providing adequate room for Post Office and retail customers alike.
- Low level writing desk and serving counter, plus an induction hearing loop for those customers with hearing difficulties
- On street car parking available within 30 yards, limited to a 20 minute period. Dedicated disabled parking in the Bullring 30 yards from the new site.
- Public transport services are available from the bus station located approx 200 yards away from the new site.
- On site convenience store, providing customers the opportunity to carry out a range of shopping under one roof

Proposed month of transfer: February 2007

How are franchise partners selected?

All of our partners, whether they are independent business people or companies, are carefully selected. We only enter into agreements when we are entirely satisfied with their suitability to operate a Post Office®.

When considering the suitability of a future partner our criteria include, financial status; commercial and retail awareness; previous good employment record; motivation and excellent customer focus.

How long are franchise contracts for?

Franchise partners are contracted to provide Post Office® services for five years, with an option to renew for a further five years at the end of that period. If the agent decides to relocate to alternative premises within this time, this must be agreed beforehand with Post Office Ltd. Any subsequent change of management would be with the agreement of Post Office Ltd and the appointment criteria applied would be the same as for any other franchisee at that time.

Registered in England number 2154540
Registered office: 80-86 Old Street, London EC1V 9NN

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Franchising

A Partnership approach to providing main Post Office® services



If you have difficulty reading this leaflet please call

08457 22 33 44

Frequently Asked Questions

Why franchise Post Office® branches?

There are currently over 14,000 Post Office® branches in the UK. The vast majority of these - some 96% - are not directly operated by Post Office Ltd but are run by agents on our behalf.

The larger Post Office® branches in high street locations have however often been run by staff employed by Post Office Ltd. The cost of running these branches is very high, and we don't make enough money in the branches to cover their costs. We have experienced a steady decline in customers, due largely to the loss of some of our most traditional areas of business, for example pension and benefit payments. We are working hard to replace this lost business with income from new products and services such as the new Post Office® credit card, Car and Home Insurance and our very successful Post Office® HomePhone service.

Post Office Ltd is therefore actively looking at ways of maintaining services in the most cost effective way possible. One option is to transfer the management of more of our larger Post Office® branches to franchisees. This has many advantages for the business, while at the same time preserving a main Post Office® presence in the locality.

Franchise partners usually look to operate a Post Office® alongside their own retail offer. This improves the viability of Post Office® branches, as both the Post Office® and retail business can be operated from the same location. Equally, both the Post Office® and retail business can benefit from the regular customer footfall visiting the store; all of which helps to secure a viable and sustainable Post Office® and retail store for our customers in the longer term. Coupled with this, franchisees put significant investment into their branches, which Post Office Ltd simply cannot afford to do.

The savings we make from transferring a branch to a franchise partner are invested in such areas as development of new products and services, which help to sustain our wider Post Office® network and therefore benefit all of our customers in the longer term. We, therefore, see franchising as a very positive step in modernising our network and maintaining our ability to continue to provide customers access to reliable and high quality services and products.

How will you ensure service standards are maintained at the franchised branch?

Post Office Ltd will train all customer advisors at the new branch to the same standards as our own employees. They will also be supported within the first few weeks of the branch transferring to our franchise partner. Inevitably, there will be a settling in period as the franchise staff adjusts to their new roles. Experience shows, however, that following this initial period, our franchise branches achieve good standards of customer satisfaction, as measured independently by an external company, whilst at the same time offering a sustainable service to customers into the long term future. Additionally, as with any other Post Office® branch, a local Post Office Ltd Manager monitors service standards on an ongoing basis.

How are franchised branches staffed?

All customer advisers working at franchised branches are directly employed by our franchisee. A dedicated branch manager would also be appointed by the franchisee to run the branch on a day to day basis, similar to in branches directly managed by Post Office Ltd.

Naturally, concerns are sometimes expressed by customers about the future of the staff working at the current Post Office® branch. The decision to franchise a branch is not made lightly, and Post Office Ltd values the hard work, commitment and loyalty provided by our staff at directly managed Post Office® branches. We do however have to take difficult commercial decisions that, regretfully, will have implications for individuals. All staff will be given the opportunity to state their personal preferences for future employment within the organisation and whenever possible, we will try to ensure these preferences are met.