



Steve Reed MP OBE
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

21 December 2018

Dear Mr Reed

I am writing further to your recent question to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), set out below for reference. As your question relates to operational matters for the Post Office, Paula Vennells, Group Chief Executive, has asked me to respond on her behalf.

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what estimate his Department has made of the number of post office branches that currently have suspended services; and if he will make a statement (198843)

We regularly report on the Post Office network as part of our annual network report, the most recent version can be found at

<http://corporate.postoffice.co.uk/modernising-post-office>.

Information on contractual matters between the Post Office and its operators is commercially confidential and is not information that is published. However, the annual network report does provide a detailed breakdown of the size and shape of network, the number of branches by Government Office Region and the split between Rural, Urban and Urban Deprived areas.

Each report also allows for the tracking of the size of the network, showing quarterly figures back to 2008, and for year on year comparison at a detailed level. The performance against the Government Accessibility Criteria is also recorded as well as the coverage for vulnerable customers.

Overall the reports, which have been produced since 2012 as a requirement under the Postal Services Act 2011, show that the Post Office network is the most stable it has been for decades. In recent years we have modernised over 7500 branches, increasing service availability for customers through extended opening hours and, with over 4000 branches open on a Sunday, the Post Office is the largest Sunday retailer.

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many post office counters have been located in a Bargain Booze off-licence in each of the last eight years; and how many Bargain Booze off-licenses that had a post office counter have subsequently closed. (198198)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many of the post office counters located in Bargain Booze off-licenses that closed in the last eight years have been relocated, and what the financial cost to the taxpayer was of those relocations. (198199)

In 2015 Post Office took the decision to no longer put post offices into dedicated off licenses. At the time of this decision, there were two Bargain Booze directly operated sites with Post Offices located in them. Of these two, one has now closed.

The Post Office has a network of over 11,500 branches. 98% of these Post Offices are operated on a franchise basis. Included in this network are retailers that operate under 'symbol banners'. These are sites which are operated as independent Post Offices with an agent choosing whom to partner with for their retail proposition, these include commercial operators such as Londis, Budgens, Premier and Bargain Booze. Independent operators regularly review and change their symbol group partners. There are currently close to 90 independent retailers who have a supply relationship with Bargain Booze for their retail offering and operate a Post Office in their premises. Many of these will be operating convenience stores as opposed to off licences.

In April 2018, Bestway Retail took responsibility for the Bargain Booze network, previously operated by Conviviality. This network remains stable.

Whenever a post office closes, we actively look to ensure that services are restored in the local area. The Post Office network is currently the most stable it has been for decades.

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many of the 41 Crown post offices in dedicated premises that are earmarked to be franchised and relocated to WHSmith have Applicant Enrolment Identification (AEI) machines; and how many of the AEI machines will be relocated to the franchisee's stores with the post office counter. (198200)

Out of the 41 branches that are proposed to be franchised to WHSmith, 39 branches currently have an Applicant Enrolment Identification (AEI) facility. Beverley and Selby are the two branches that do not have the service. Of the 39, 29 will retain the AEI service. The ten that won't retain it are: Andover; Bristol; Clacton; Dartford; Kendal; Penrith; Pontefract; Scarborough; Trowbridge and Camborne.

Scarborough, Andover, Penrith and Pontefract already have (or will have) AEI services within around two miles. For the others we are looking at the possibility of transferring the service to another branch in the area.

Of the 39 branches, 21 currently offer the Biometric Enrolment Service for the Home Office. This will no longer be offered in any of the branches, not as a consequence of franchising but because of Home Office's decision to award the contract for the service to a different provider.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MCD M D', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark Davies
Group Communications and Corporate Affairs Director