

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 7th June 2007
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy
SUBJECT: Future of Halton Lea Post Office
WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to draw Members' attention to the consultation exercise being undertaken by the Post Office regarding the future arrangements for the provision of Post Office services in Halton Lea Shopping Centre.

2.0 RECOMMENDED that the Council:

- (1) submits an interim objection to the new arrangements until the meeting of the Urban Renewal PPB takes place;**
- (2) requests to see the proposed layout of the new facilities; and**
- (3) authorises the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy, in consultation with the Executive Board Member for Corporate Services, to make further comments after the meeting of the Urban Renewal PPB.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Executive Board, at its meeting on 29th March 2007, considered a report which provided details of a consultation paper issued by the Department for Trade and Industry on the future of the Post Office network. The Executive Board supported the actions taken by the Chief Executive in expressing concern about any proposals that reduce the Post Office network in Halton.

3.2 The Council has now been consulted by the Post Office regarding proposals to change the arrangements for providing Post Office services in Halton Lea, Runcorn. Their proposal is to transfer the existing Post Office services from their existing location at 88 Forest Walk to the Branch of W. H. Smith within Halton Lea.

3.3 Attached as Appendix 1 to this report is a copy of a letter received from the National Consultation Manager from Post Office Ltd. which provides more details of the proposals.

3.4 In order to understand better the proposals being put forward by the Post Office, the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board have

invited representatives from the Post Office to their next meeting on 20th June 2007 to provide more details on the proposed changes. Unfortunately, this will be after the date set by the Post Office for the receipt of comments, 14th June 2007. It is therefore suggested that in the interim period the Council should write to the Post Office objecting to the proposed new arrangements. The Council should also ask to see the proposed physical layout of the new facilities in W. H. Smith, given concerns that have been expressed about the capacity of the W. H. Smith premises to house such a facility. The current Post Office is often very busy.

3.5 An informal discussion has been held with Fordgate, the owners of Halton Lea. Their comments included:

- They are very disappointed with the move, but within the existing lease agreements they cannot do anything about it.
- The current post office is very busy and they have concerns about how W. H. Smith are going to cope with the management of the additional footfall.
- The moving of the post office will leave the existing adjacent shops there with much reduced passing footfall. The danger is that this will result in a very dead corner in Halton Lea.
- The post office has a residue of lease left on their current premises which Fordgate had not, at that time, been contacted about.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Council needs to fully understand the impact such a change will have on the vitality and viability of the Town Centre. Post Offices play an important role in the community beyond the provision of services. The Council will want to be reassured that there will be no reduction in services.

5.0 RISK ANALYSIS

5.1 There are no direct risk implications for the Council.

6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

6.1 The Post Office provides an important service access point for many individuals. It is vital the service remains accessible to all who need to use it.

**7.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D
OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Consultation letter	I. Leivesley's Office, 6th Floor, Municipal Building, Widnes	I. Leivesley