

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 05 December 2016

Portfolio:	Policy & Resources
Subject:	Fareham Town Centre Post Office Proposed Relocation: Response to Consultation
Report of:	Director of Planning & Regulation
Strategy/Policy:	Economic Development
Corporate Objective:	To maintain and extend prosperity To build strong and inclusive communities.

Purpose:

To seek approval to the Council's consultation response in relation to Fareham Town Centre Post Office proposed relocation.

Executive summary:

On 26 October 2016 the Council received a consultation letter from Post Office Limited in relation to the Fareham Crown Post Office branch proposed move to new premises and branch modernisation. This report briefly outlines the nature of the proposal as detailed in the consultation letter and accompanying information sheet received. It highlights the issues that this proposal presents; including any matters of concern or where further information or clarification is requested.

Recommendation:

That the Executive agrees:

- (a) to receive a verbal update following any response to questions raised with the Post Office Limited; and
- (b) that comments included in the attached Executive Briefing Paper are formally submitted to the consultation exercise being carried out by Post Office Limited.

Reason:

To ensure that the Council's comments are agreed by the Executive before being formally submitted to Post Office Limited as part of their consultation exercise.

Cost of proposals:

None.

Appendices:

A: Letter and accompanying information sheet from Post Office Limited to the Council (dated 26 October 2016).

B: Plan which shows the location of the existing Post Office and proposed new location within WHSmith.

Background papers: None.

Reference papers: None.

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Executive Briefing Paper

Date:	05 December 2016
Subject:	Fareham Town Centre Post Office Proposed Relocation: Response to Consultation
Briefing by:	Director of Planning & Regulation
Portfolio:	Policy & Resources

INTRODUCTION

1. On 26 October 2016 the Council received a consultation letter from Post Office Limited in relation to the Fareham Crown Post Office branch proposed move to new premises and branch modernisation. Appendix A has a copy of this letter.
2. The letter explains that the Post Office Limited is proposing to move Fareham Crown Post Office (117 West Street) to the WHSmith store (4 Savoy Buildings, West Street Fareham). Appendix B has a plan which shows the location of the existing Fareham Crown Post Office and proposed new location.
3. The letter explains that the proposal is aimed at modernising the network and to allow a Crown Post Office to remain in Fareham. Post Office Limited is of the opinion that the WHSmith store will provide an excellent host location for their Fareham branch, as well as the WHSmith retail offer complementing Post Office products and services.
4. The letter explains that Post Office Limited is now starting a period of public consultation and it would like the Council, along with other organisations and individuals it has contacted, to comment on the proposal. Post Office Limited welcomes any feedback and general comments, as well as views on specific areas. The consultation runs for 6 weeks from 26 October 2016 until 7 December 2016 via an on-line survey, helpline, freepost, email and web-site options. If the proposal goes ahead following consultation, the proposed move would be in the month of March next year (2017).
5. This report outlines the nature of the proposal as detailed in the consultation letter and accompanying information sheet received. It highlights the issues that this proposal presents; including any matters of concern or where further information or clarification is requested.

POST OFFICE LIMITED PROPOSALS

6. The proposals clearly look to locate the modernised Post Office on the first floor of the WHSmith store, which can be accessed by a customer lift or stairs. The lift, according to this letter, can carry up to 10 people and accommodate wheelchairs and pushchairs.
7. The Council understands that there are seven counter positions and three self-service accommodated within the current Post Office layout. The proposals, as set out in the letter, would provide five counter service position, four open plan positions and one traditional style position, as well as three self-service kiosks.
8. It is important to highlight that the proposal makes no change to the Post Office opening hours (as detailed in the accompanying information sheet in Appendix A).

COMMENTS ON PROPOSALS

Concerns Regarding the Proposals Locating Post Office Services on the First Floor

9. The Council is of the opinion that proposals to locate the modernised Post Office on the first floor of the WHSmith store would be both an actual and perceived worsening of internal access arrangements for customers and therefore the local community. Currently the customer lift is located in a setback position deep within the WHSmith store, just before it widens out on its westerly side. The Council would suggest that a more suitable internal layout would be to position the Post Office services on the ground floor. It may not be suitable to position all the Post Office services in the front section of the ground floor within the WHSmith store (close to the entrance doors). The Council however are of the opinion that without doubt it could be accommodated in the rear of the ground floor. This would mean that there would be no need for alternative arrangements to access Post Office services via a designated till point on the ground floor, as suggested in the letter. It would also ensure all customers are able to access the high value services, such as business banking and foreign currency, on the ground floor.

Further Information Requested: Customer Needs

10. According to the consultation letter, the proposed counter arrangement is based on current and forecast future business levels. It is difficult for the Council to offer a direct response to this proposed change, as there is not sufficient evidence provided in the consultation material to understand the needs of all customers. However, the Council would recommend that the Post Office provide evidence of customer needs to clearly justify their proposals and provide more details of the three proposed types of service offered, so customers can provide an informed response to these consultation proposals. The Council would also recommend the Post Office ensure customer needs are actively monitored, so changes in their needs are fully accommodated. Finally, the Council is aware that the current Post Office is used for Council tax, housing rent and benefits debt payments and would therefore recommend these customers' needs are fully accommodated in these proposals.

Concerns Regarding Potential Transitional Arrangements

11. The Council is aware that two post boxes and a cashpoint are located under the canopy of the current Post Office. If the relocation proposal goes ahead in March of next year, the Council is concerned that the consultation letter does not make it clear what will happen to this canopy area (i.e. transitional arrangements), including access to the cash

machine and post boxes. The Council has made contact with the Post Office, who has committed to a meeting along with the landowners, to discuss how this canopy area can be managed to prevent any anti-social issues (which have been prevalent in recent years) and access to services ensured.

12. With a large number of street drinkers choosing to sleep under this canopy, there are issues with the amount of alcohol-related crime and disorder occurring. The latest Police information shows that since 2014, there has been a steady increase in anti-social behaviour and crime associated with street drinkers. In summer of 2016, there has been a substantial increase in crimes associated with drinking, violence and drugs in the areas around West Street (including Trinity Church Gardens, Museum Gardens, The Gillies, Gardens of Reflection and Osborn Road Multi-storey Car Park). Statistically between two five-month periods, November 2015 to March 2016, and April 2016 to August 2016, reported anti-social behaviour has risen in Fareham East Ward (around the Post Office area) by 22%. According to research carried out via the 'Police Record Management System', 694 incidents were reported to Police between 24/02/2016 and 31/08/2016 in the Fareham East Ward. This includes all anti-social behaviour offences, theft, all public order offences, assaults, assaults on Police, domestic disputes and other disputes and drug offences. Of those, 208 were proven to be directly linked to those affiliated with the rough sleepers or street drinkers.
13. If the proposal goes ahead and vacancy arises, the Council will work in partnership to ensure that the vacant building and canopy area is secured and further opportunities to engage in rough sleeping or criminal acts are carefully designed out.
14. For information, the Council has emailed the Fareham Post Office Manager with a series of questions to enable a fuller reply to this consultation, which has been forwarded to relevant colleagues, including direct to the contact point on the consultation letter. At this juncture the Council is awaiting a response from Post Office Limited. In light of this circumstance, should the Council receive a response, this will be verbally reported to the Executive by Officers, along with any necessary Council comments.
15. The Council is keen to work with landowners and relevant parties where any vacancy within Fareham Town Centre arises, with the ambition to enhance the vibrancy and vitality of area concerned. If the proposal goes ahead, Officers will work with Post Office Limited, the landowner of 117 West Street and other relevant parties to ensure that any future suitable scheme for this location can be facilitated to prevent long-term vacancy.
16. The Council advises, as good practice, that a full accessibility audit of the proposed facility and services is carried out by Post Office Limited. It is also only advisory that these be made public and consulted upon to ensure all customers are accommodated and catered for.
17. The Council advises that a full equalities assessment of the proposed facility and services is carried out by Post Office Limited. It is also advisory that these be made public and consulted upon to ensure all customers are accommodated and catered for.

RECOMMENDATIONS

18. It is recommended that the Executive receive a verbal update following receipt of any

responses from the Post Office Limited and that the above Council comments are formally submitted to the consultation exercise being carried out by Post Office Limited.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Claire Burnett, Head of Planning Strategy & Regeneration. (Ext 4330)