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Group: Communication Workers Union

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From the office of Dave Ward General Secretary

Email: **GRO** Direct line: **GRO**

Date: 15 June 2015

The Baroness Neville-Rolfe DBE CMG  
Minister of State  
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills  
1 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0ET

Dear Lady Neville-Rolfe,

I write as the recently elected General Secretary of the Communication Workers' Union, representing 200,000 members in post, telecoms and financial services to seek an urgent meeting with you regarding the future of Post Office Ltd and the Post Office Network, which I understand you have ministerial responsibility for.

Some 6,000 of our members, which include postmasters, are involved in working for or sustaining the Post Office Network under the auspices of the Post Office Ltd (POL).

We welcomed the Coalition government's desire in Securing the Post Office Network in the Digital Age (November 2010) for the Post Office to become a 'genuine Front Office for Government at both the national and local level' and to grow its revenues from financial services. Over the past five years, however, its income in both of these areas has fallen or stagnated.

As you will be aware, there is a government commitment to fund POL through to 2018 and an on-going programme of rationalisation of Post Office locations known as Network Transformation. We note that the Conservative Manifesto for the 2015 General Election was silent on this matter.

We are most concerned that a viable Post Office Network, a traditional and important feature of the British social and commercial landscape for nearly 200 years, is in danger of being eroded beyond viability. We do not believe that this is a conscious or intentional policy objective of government, but an unintended and possibly overlooked consequence of the current arrangements.

We have particular concerns for the 3,000 locations where the Post Office is effectively the "last shop in the village" (known as the Community sector) and the subsequent impact on rural communities, and for the circa 3000 mainstream branches that have yet to be converted to a new model either due to refusing to embrace the new model or through not being able to convert due to lack of interest by other retailers. The future for these postmasters and their branches is uncertain.

We do think that there is an opportunity for a fresh approach which can meet the needs of a wide range of stakeholders, including HM Government, the small business community, the current and future customers of Post Offices, and our members who work in the network, from postmasters to Counter Clerks.

As you would expect, we are in close and usually constructive dialogue with the senior management in Post Office Ltd, and Royal Mail as their largest corporate customers. As the Minister responsible in the sponsoring department, we would very much welcome the opportunity to share our concerns and our thoughts on how a more optimistic outlook can be secured.

We would also wish to discuss with you the possibilities for a moratorium on the current Network Transformation programme. We believe the conversion of Post Offices under this programme is now at the stage where voluntary activity is close to being exhausted. We do not believe that anyone ever intended for Post Office conversions and Network Transformation to take place on a compulsory basis and that therefore a pause in activity so that the impact of the programme can be assessed and a fresh assessment of risks and opportunities made is appropriate.

In closing, we do believe that a new political settlement is possible which offers a more robust, productive and efficient Post Office Network going forward. We are ready, able and keen to play our part in that and therefore hope it would be possible to meet with you and your officials in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

**GRO**

**Dave Ward**  
General Secretary