

Working Group: Post Office Limited, National Federation of SubPostmasters, Department for Business and Trade

Details: 10:00-10:40, MS Teams

Attendees:

Minister Hollinrake

- Post Office Limited (POL): Martin Roberts, Group Chief Retail Officer. Tracy Marshall, Retail Engagement Director. Katie Solomon, Communications Advisor, Corporate Affairs, Brand & Communications.
- National Federation of SubPostmasters (NFSP): Calum Greenhow, CEO. Ruth Buckley-Salmon, Public Affairs Manager. Sue Edgar, Chair of Negotiating and Engagement Team. Tim Boothman, Chair.
- DBT Policy Officials: Carl Creswell, Director. Eleanor Brooks, Deputy Director. Ed Baird, Policy Lead. Will Briant, Senior Policy Advisor

Cora Sweet, Private Secretary

Actions:

- **NFSP to share details of Postmasters concerned by outreach closures with POL.**
- **POL to share further details of underused outreach services with NFSP.**
- **NFSP to update DBT on 'Ways of Working' and DVLA services at next working level meeting.**

MEETING STARTS

Inquiry:

- Calum Greenhow (CG) expressed his disappointment that the Inquiry had to be suspended due to POL's inability to disclose information on time. In his view the culture at POL isn't right, and this was also shown with the remuneration issue. He feels HMG should be taking a more active role as shareholder in holding POL to account.
- Minister Hollinrake (KH) agreed that it is disappointing that the Inquiry has been paused. However, he wanted to be clear that he didn't want to group all these issues together – the Inquiry disclosure issue is separate to the remuneration issue, and as CG knows, DBT has commissioned an independent assessment of what went wrong there and are waiting to hear back soon.
- Martin Roberts (MR) said that under CEO Nick Read's leadership, POL is doing everything it can to improve the relationship with postmasters. CG queried this, and said he felt that the relationship has gone backwards over the last 2 years. He wants to see more action from HMG on this.

Outreach Closures

- Tim Boothman (TB) explained that the NFSP has been made aware that POL is evaluating outreach services and scaling some back/ closing some altogether. The NFSP have not been consulted with this decision, and some postmasters may be losing out as they may be left to pay leases on properties they used for the provision of the outreach services, etc.
- MR explained the reasons why POL is making these changes: outreach services are important, but some branches have very limited impact, and it doesn't make business sense to keep them open as they are expensive to run. POL has been consulting with the individual postmasters and they agree with POL's rationale about this decision being cost-effective.

- TB raised the case of one postmaster whose hours are being reduced drastically by the closure of outreach services, and he will require support. MR urged TB to share the details cases such as these, and he'll look into it.
- Tracy Marshall (TM) said that POL has done some research and 30 outreaches haven't served any customers in a 3-month period. She acknowledged that POL should have consulted the NFSP more, and she is going to set up a meeting with the NFSP to discuss outreach strategy. Sue Edgar (SE) queried the figure of 30 outreaches with no customers, and wanted more information, which TM confirmed she'd be happy to provide.
- CG said he felt like POL is undermining the NFSP by not running broad consultations ahead of implementing new strategies.
- KH said that his key priority is to make POL a sustainable business going forward, and using resources well is a key part of this, so it's reasonable that POL is looking at this. He thinks POL should be consulting with NFSP as well as individual postmasters, to ensure postmasters aren't losing out.

- TB outlined that he's concerned about postmaster morale as postmasters are businesspeople with reputations to uphold, and the reputation of POL as a company is impacting postmasters. TB urged Government as shareholder to take drastic action here, holding the Board properly to account and put the company into the voluntary administration.
- KH thanked TB for his feedback and pushed back on the reputation point – he thinks there's a difference between the reputation of POL and the network itself, and he thinks that the brand is strong in terms of community post offices. KH thinks that there are decent people at POL trying to do the right thing, though of course he's keen to hold POL to account for various issues.
- CG said that he will update HMG colleagues tomorrow on 'ways of working' between NFSP and POL. He wants these Working Group meetings to focus on the key strategic issues facing postmasters, but feels he has to raise these serious issues.
- MR said he takes this feedback on board and is keen to engage and improve the dialogue. KH encouraged both parties to work together and said that he would take the message of consulting more with the NFSP to the Post Office board away day.

MEETING ENDS