

Post Office Closure Programme Sub-Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Post Office Closure Programme Sub-Committee** held in the **Garden Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes** on **Thursday, 24 January 2008** at 12.30pm.

Present:

Councillor J H Freeman (Chair on election)
Councillors D M Gray and I A Nicholson

Apology Received:

Councillor A C De Vecchi

Minutes

Action

172 Election of Chair

Resolved:

172.1 That Councillor Freeman be elected Chair for this meeting of the Post Office Closure Programme Sub-Committee.

Reason for the Decision:

To elect a Chair for this meeting of the Sub-Committee in the absence of Councillor De Vecchi.

173 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

174 Declaration of Substitute Member

Councillor Gray substituted for Councillor De Vecchi in accordance with the provision set out in Cabinet Minute No 131.1 of its meeting held on 21 November 2007.

175 Urgent Item

The Chair advised that he had agreed, in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, that a letter which had been sent to the Chief Executive from Postwatch dated 21 January 2008 entitled "Public Consultation on Sussex Post Office

Closures”, which was circulated to the Members of the Sub-Committee at the meeting, be considered as a matter of urgency under Agenda Item 5 entitled “Post Office Closure Programme”, in order that the Sub-Committee could take its decisions based on the most recent information which was available.

176 Post Office Closure Programme

At the last meeting of the Sub-Committee, the Head of Democratic Services, in consultation with the Members of the Sub-Committee, was authorised to respond to the consultation which was being undertaken in respect of the Post Office closure programme by the deadline of 24 December 2007.

A copy of the response which had been sent to the Post Office was set out in the Agenda papers and included the following paragraph:

“The Council believes that the retention of the Landport branch is so vital to residents that it is prepared to consider meeting the cost of the provision of the space within the building where the Post Office is currently located if that would ensure its long term retention as a Post Office.”

(Note: Councillor Nicholson had disagreed with the inclusion of the above paragraph in the Council’s response).

The Post Office had subsequently suggested a meeting to discuss, in confidence, the financial details relating to branches where there might be a possibility of local funding and to talk about how such funding could work in practice.

The Head of Democratic Services had responded that what the Council had in mind was that it would take responsibility for the payment of rent and business rates in respect of the Post Office element of the Landport building which, if implemented, would be on condition that the retention of the Landport Post Office must not be at the expense of any other branch in the District.

The Head of Democratic Services had also stressed that any financial offer which may be discussed could only be on an informal basis and would need ultimately to be considered and agreed by the Cabinet.

The Post Office had then sought clarification as to whether there were any other branches, in addition to Landport, that the Council might be interested in supporting financially as it had understood that there may be others based on correspondence and conversations with Councillor Nicholson.

Councillor Nicholson was of the opinion that at this stage the discussions with the Post Office on the issue of financial support should be in relation to all of the branches in the District which were threatened with closure, rather

than just the one at Landport.

The Sub-Committee was therefore asked to consider whether there was a case for including any other Post Offices in the District in the discussions with the Post Office concerning possible financial support.

The Head of Democratic Services circulated a letter which had been sent to the Chief Executive from Postwatch dated 21 January 2008 entitled "Public Consultation on Sussex Post Office Closures", (a copy of which is contained in the Minute Book). It set out Postwatch South East's position on the Post Office proposals in respect of the closure programme, following the end of the formal public consultation period.

Resolved:

176.1 That the letter to the Chief Executive from Postwatch dated 21 January 2008 entitled "Public Consultation on Sussex Post Office Closures" be received and noted;

176.2 That the Head of Democratic Services be authorised to write to the Post Office to take up its offer of a meeting to discuss, in confidence, the financial details relating to branches where there might be a possibility of local funding and to talk about how such funding could work in practice, such discussions to cover all five of the branches in the District which the Post Office are proposing for closure, namely:

- Landport Branch, 34 Lee Road, Landport, Lewes;
- Mount Pleasant Branch, 2 Avis Parade Shops, Avis Road, Newhaven;
- Claremont Road Branch, 23 Claremont Road, Seaford;
- Fairways Estate Branch, Fairways Estate, 4 Newick Close, Seaford; and
- North Chailey Branch, Haywards Heath Road, North Chailey;

176.3 That, in the event that the Post Office indicate that the discussions referred to in 176.2 may only take place if they relate to a lesser number of Post Offices, the Head of Democratic Services be authorised to indicate that such discussions shall cover the first three branches listed in 176.2 above; and

176.4 That any financial offer which may be discussed at the meeting with the Post Office be on an informal basis and, ultimately, be considered and agreed by the Cabinet.

Action

HDS

HDS

HDS

Action

In accordance with paragraph 17 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules, the Sub-Committee agreed that Resolutions 176.2 to 176.4 above were urgent in order that the meeting between Members of the Sub-Committee and Post Office officials could be held at the earliest opportunity.

Reason for the Decisions:

To respond to the offer made by the Post Office for a meeting to discuss, in confidence, the financial details relating to branches where there might be a possibility of local funding and to talk about how such funding could work in practice, in an effort to reduce the number of Post Office closures in the District.

177 Notice of Motion – Response

At its meeting on 4 December 2007, the Council had passed a Notice of Motion relating to the proposals set out in the Post Office closure programme and services which were provided by the Post Office (Council Minute No 149(b) refers).

A letter dated 9 January 2008 which had been received from the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform in response to the Notice of Motion, was set out in the Agenda papers. The letter had been circulated to all members of the Council for information.

Resolved:

That the letter which had been received from the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform in response to the Notice of Motion passed by the Council at its meeting on 4 December 2007, be received and noted.

Reason for the Decision:

To note the contents of the letter which had been received from the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform in respect of the Post Office closure programme.

The meeting ended at 1.15pm

J H Freeman
Chair