

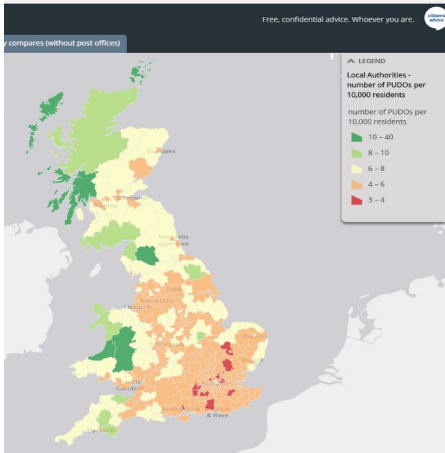


Post Office News - July 2018

Citizens Advice maps Britain's parcel shops

There are now around 40,000 locations where consumers can collect, send and return their online shopping deliveries and parcels. These locations include post offices, as well as alternative pick up and drop off points (PUDOs) in local shops and parcel lockers. PUDO points can provide important options for consumers who are unable to receive deliveries during the day, as well as locations to send and return parcels.

For the first time, Citizens Advice has mapped [access to PUDO points](#) across Britain. Our analysis reveals that overall, there is good provision of PUDOs. However, levels of consumer access to PUDO points varies depending on geography. Consumers in the most deprived areas are best served by PUDO points. But post offices prop up consumer access to parcel services in some areas, particularly for rural consumers.



Alongside our findings we also publish an [interactive map](#) allowing consumers to explore the provision of PUDO points in their community. We will produce a more comprehensive analysis of consumer access to PUDO points including research into consumer experience, later this year.

Since publication, the dynamic nature of the PUDO network has been underscored, with the announcement of the [closure of the Pass My Parcel service](#) (available through 3,000 retailers). Subsequent [reports](#) indicate the parcel shop network may be taken over by Deutsche Post subsidiary UK Mail.

Post Office changes how it informs customers of local branch changes

Citizens Advice and the Post Office have agreed on how the Post Office will tell consumers about future local post office changes. The Post Office needed to update its approach as the planned Network Transformation Programme (NTP) comes to an end, and to reflect future day-to-day change.

The [Principles of Community Engagement](#) sets out when Post Office Ltd (POL) will notify customers of change (eg around opening hours, temporary closures and mobile post office locations). It explains the Post Office will seek feedback on decisions that have been made when re-opening temporarily closed branches in a new location and franchising Crown post offices on existing sites. But POL will consult on proposals prior to decisions being made when a branch is to permanently close or relocate.

The agreement also describes the role of the independent statutory consumer watchdogs - Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice Scotland and the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland. We will continue to review all customer feedback to make a final recommendation to POL for the final few NTP cases and for any future Crown post office changes. We will also continue to monitor day-to-day changes to consider any potential impact on consumers. For more details see our [blog](#) or contact Richard.Brown@citizensadvice.org.uk.

Citizens Advice reports on community-run post offices

Nearly 200 of the UK's post offices are based in community-run shops or pubs. Community-run post offices help maintain consumer access to essential postal and basic banking services - often surviving where a commercial enterprise cannot.

In a short [report](#) we highlight our new research into community-run shops. We find community-run enterprises offering Post Office services tend to be based in less deprived rural areas that face significant barriers to accessing services, and with poor access to banks and shops. The majority of operators say that providing post office services:

- Reduces social isolation in the community
- Increases the strength of the local economy
- Develops skills and experience in the local community

However, setting up a community-run post office can be challenging. Citizens Advice will be working with POL and the [Plunkett Foundation](#) to make it easier for community-run enterprises to deliver Post Office services.

Post Office plan to acquire Payzone's bill payments business

The Post Office has [announced](#) its intention to acquire [Payzone's](#) bill payments business. The acquisition would add 13,500 outlets to the existing 11,500 post offices already offering Post Office bill payment services.

The last decade has seen a significant drop in the number of people using post offices for bill payment, as the majority of consumers now pay their utility bills by direct debit. Citizens Advice [research](#) shows that in 2017, 6% of all consumers were paying utility bills or topping up prepay meters or mobile phones at post offices. However, this service is used more by vulnerable consumers such as people who are digitally excluded, older or on low incomes.

Ofcom to investigate Royal Mail's failure to meet target

The postal regulator is to [investigate](#) Royal Mail's [failure to meet its annual regulatory target](#) for First Class Mail. Royal Mail delivered 91.6% the next working day, against a target of 93%. Royal Mail says deliveries were affected by industrial relations, severe weather and the flu outbreak.

Ofcom is able to impose financial penalties on Royal Mail. However, penalties must be proportionate to the regulatory breach. Last time the regulator investigated Royal Mail, Ofcom decided not to impose a penalty.

UK letter price in line with most European countries

A new [study](#) of letter prices throughout Europe shows UK letter prices are similar to those in many other countries. A domestic standard letter costs €0.76, similar to prices in Germany (€0.70), the Netherlands (€0.83) and Belgium (€0.87). Prices in Denmark (€3.63) and Iceland (€4.94) are highest, and lowest in Malta (€0.26).

UK letter prices have increased by almost 40% over the last decade, once inflation is taken into account - less than the 55% European average. Price increases for other countries vary significantly from under 5% in Austria to the striking price hikes of over 300% in Italy, Denmark and Iceland.

Website offers consumers help with parcel surcharging issues

Consumers in some of the less central areas of the UK, such as the Scottish Highlands and Islands, have been angered that they often have to pay more for their parcel deliveries. A newly launched [website](#) - funded by Trading Standards Scotland - provides information for consumers and businesses on their rights and obligations in relation to parcel delivery.

The website launch follows an Advertising Standards Authority [crackdown](#) on companies who make misleading claims over parcel deliveries. Citizens Advice Scotland [research](#) found consumers with Highlands and Islands addresses are charged at least 30% more for parcel delivery, than in other areas of mainland Britain.

Research shows accelerating rate of bank branch closures

[New research](#) from Which? shows around 60 bank branches are closing every month. The consumer group found that 2,868 branches will have closed between 2015 and the end of 2018, with the number accelerating this year. In contrast, [Post Office Ltd figures](#) show a net total of 25 post offices closed between 2015 and 2017.

Which? acknowledges post offices as an alternative option, but expresses concern they do not offer the full range of banking services that a consumer can receive in a bank.

Parliamentary committee examining future role of the high street

The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee has launched an inquiry looking at the future of England's high streets and town centres. The inquiry is examining the contribution of the high street to the local economy and the health, cohesion and cultural life of the local community, in the context of changing demographic and technological trends.

A written response from Citizens Advice (Post) recognises the increasing digitisation of communications, transactions and retail poses a risk to both high streets and post offices. However, we emphasise that in some ways post offices are now becoming more important, particularly as banks close and people are shopping online. For more details contact Annabel.Barnett@citizensadvice.org.uk.

Citizens Advice publishes consumer work plan 2018/19

We have published our [current work plan](#). The work plan describes how Citizens Advice will discharge our role as the statutory advocate for consumers of energy and postal services in 2018/19. It takes on board feedback from the 62 responses we received to our consultation - many thanks to all our Post stakeholders who contributed.

More on Citizens Advice post policy work

- See our section on the Citizens Advice [website](#)
- Follow our Twitter account for regular updates: @CABPost